THE SICKNESS UNTO DEATH

A NEW TRANSLATION

TRANSLATED AND INTRODUCED BY

BRUCE H. KIRMMSE

SØREN KIERKEGAARD

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Liveright Publishing Corporation

A Division of W. W. Norton & Company
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TRANSLATOR'S INTRODUCTION

THE ALGEBRA OF THE SPIRIT

WE BEGIN, as Kierkegaard does, with the story, in the Gospel of John, of Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead:

> Now a certain man was sick, named Lazarus, of Bethany, the town of Mary and her sister Martha. (It was that Mary which anointed the Lord with ointment, and wiped his feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was sick.) Therefore his sisters sent unto him, saying, "Lord, behold, he whom thou lovest is sick." When Jesus heard that, he said, "This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby" (John 11:1–4, Authorized ["King James"] Version).

Thus Lazarus was indeed sick, but his sickness was not "unto death," for as Jesus explains, "our friend Lazarus sleepeth," to which the disciples, relieved, reply, "Lord, if he sleep, he shall do well" (vv. 11–12). But the disciples misunderstood Jesus, and the gospel narrative therefore informs the reader that "Jesus spake of his death: but they thought that he had spoken of taking of rest in sleep" (v. 13). The error had to be remedied: "Then said Jesus unto them plainly, 'Lazarus is dead' " (v. 14). Thereafter Jesus and his disciples went to Lazarus's grave to see for themselves, and

“when Jesus came, he found that he had lain in the grave four days already” (v. 17).

> Then said Martha unto Jesus, “Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died. But I know, that even now, whatso-ever thou wilt ask of God, God will give it thee.” Jesus saith unto her, “Thy brother shall rise again.” Martha saith unto him, “I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day.” Jesus said unto her, “I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this?” She saith unto him, “Yea, Lord: I believe that thou art the Christ, the Son of God, which should come into the world” (vv. 21—27).

And so Jesus, accompanied by Mary, Martha, several of his disciples, and other spectators, went to the grave where Lazarus lay:

> Jesus said, “Take ye away the stone.” Martha, the sister of him that was dead, saith unto him, “Lord, by this time he stinketh: for he hath been dead four days.” Jesus saith unto her, “Said I not unto thee, that, if thou wouldest believe, thou shouldest see the glory of God?” Then they took away the stone from the place where the dead was laid. And Jesus lifted up his eyes, and said, “Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me. And I knew that thou hearest me always: but because of the people which stand by I said it, that they may believe that thou hast sent me.” And when he thus had spoken, he cried with a loud voice, “Lazarus, come forth.” And he that was dead came forth, bound hand and foot with graveclothes: and his face was bound about with a napkin. Jesus saith unto them, “Loose him, and let him go” (vv. 39–44).

Though he appeared to be dead, Lazarus was not dead: his sickness had not been “unto death,” but was a mere physical illness that served to demonstrate “the glory of God.” What, then, is a sickness that *is* “unto death,” if not death itself? This question constitutes Kierkegaard’s point of

departure in his “Christian psychological exposition for edification and awakening.”

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* *

To answer this question, we must first look at the genesis of *The Sickness unto Death*, and at Søren Kierkegaard’s understanding of its place in his works. In many ways, Kierkegaard’s *Fear and Trembling*, first published in 1843, and *The Sickness unto Death*, first published in 1849, can be viewed as a pair of bookends. The six years that separate the two works might seem a relatively brief interval, but Kierkegaard’s short life—he died at forty-two—was characterized by a literary productivity that is almost without parallel. Indeed, in forty-two years, he published no fewer than forty-two works.

In *Fear and Trembling*, Kierkegaard’s pseudonym Johannes de silentio marshaled an assortment of literary and historical figures in presenting the case for a third dimension that is neither self- and sense-centered (the “aesthetic”) nor other- and society-centered (the “ethical”), but is transcendent and God-centered (faith, the “religious”). Thus, in 1843, Kierkegaard had Johannes de silentio adumbrate the boundaries of the religious, but *Fear and Trembling* was not an overtly Christian work. The other bookend would be supplied years later, when Kierkegaard’s pseudonym Anti-Climacus—originally named “Johannes Anticlimacus,” perhaps to emphasize the relation to and contrast with the other Johannes, who wrote *Fear and Trembling*—published *The Sickness unto Death*, a far more compact and tightly argued work, which presents the case that, properly understood, this religious sphere is in fact specifically *Christian*.

Early in 1848, Kierkegaard wrote in his journal that “a new book is to be written called: ‘Thoughts That Heal from the Ground Up, Christian Healing.’ The doctrine of the atonement will be treated here. First it will show where the root of the sickness is found: sin. . . . 1) [The book] will be about the consciousness of sin. ‘The Sickness unto Death.’ ”[i] Somewhat later, probably in early May, amid the aftershocks of revolutionary uprisings in Denmark and in Europe generally, Kierkegaard wrote in his journal that “even in these days, I’ve worked on a new book on the sickness unto

death."[ii] Not long after, on May 13, 1848, Kierkegaard wrote a detailed "Report on *The Sickness unto Death*," in which he noted:

> The book has a difficulty: it is too dialectical and harsh to make proper use of the rhetorical, the engaging, the enthralling. The title itself seems to indicate that it ought to contain discourses; the title is lyrical. . . .
>
> What must be understood by the expression, "sickness unto death."
>
> No. 1. Its hiddenness. . . . No. 2. Its universality . . . every other kind of sickness is limited in one way or another; by climate, age, etc. . . . No. 3. Its sustained character throughout all ages—eternally. . . . No. 4. Where does it reside? In the self. despairing ignorance about having a self; knowledge of having a self, despairingly not to want to be oneself, or despairingly to want to be oneself. But the fact of the matter is that the project is far too large for a rhetorical format, because each individual figure must be sketched poetically. Dialectical algebra does it better.[i]

Although he abandoned the notion of employing a "rhetorical format" to present his "exposition" about sin, and instead opted for the more compact and technical language of "dialectical algebra," Kierkegaard nonetheless decided "it would be best to use the title *The Sickness unto Death*; it is so rhetorical."[ii] It's likely that most of the material for the book had already been completed by May 13 or 14, 1848, when he made these remarks, but Kierkegaard remained uncertain as to whether he wanted to include *The Sickness unto Death* as part of a larger work or publish it on its own. A year passed before Kierkegaard decided to publish it as a separate work, though he would go on to reuse the name of its pseudonymous author, Anti-Climacus, in connection with related material that he published in 1850, under the title *Practice in Christianity*.

The manuscript of *The Sickness unto Death* was delivered to the printer on June 29, 1849, at which point Kierkegaard noted in his journal: "At any rate *The Sickness unto Death* is now coming out, but pseudonymously with me as editor. . . . The pseudonym is named Johannes Anticlimacus, in

contrast to Climacus, who claimed not to be Christian; Anticlimacus stands at the opposite extreme: a Christian to an extraordinary degree—I myself push it only to the point of being a perfectly simple Christian."[i] Shortly thereafter, Kierkegaard reiterates this point, explaining that "I positioned myself above J[ohannes] C[limacus], below Anti-C[limacus]."[ii]

The printing was finished on July 27, 1849, and *The Sickness unto Death* was advertised for sale three days later.

* * *

Now to the book itself: what *is* the sickness unto death? Kierkegaard's pseudonym Anti-Climacus informs us that the sickness that is unto death is a sickness not of the body but of the spirit, and therefore, of "the self." If the self is not the body, what is it? Here, near the outset of the book, Anti-Climacus presents the reader with his compact definition of the self, a definition indeed so compact that it can benefit from some unpacking.

> A human being is spirit. But what is spirit? Spirit is the self. But what is the self? The self is a relation that relates to itself, or it is that in the relation which is the relation's relating to itself. The self is not the relation, but is *that* the relation relates to itself. A human being is a synthesis of the infinite and the finite, of the temporal and the eternal, of freedom and necessity, in short, a synthesis. A synthesis is a relation between two terms. Considered in this way, a human being is not yet a self.
>
> In a relation between two, the relation is the third as a negative unity, and the two relate to the relation, and in the relation to the relation; thus, under the aspect of psyche, the relation between psyche and body is a relation. On the other hand, if the relation relates to itself, then this relation is the positive third, and this is the self.
>
> Such a relation that relates to itself, a self, must either have established itself or have been established by another.

> If the relation that relates to itself has been established by another, then the relation is surely the third, but this relation, the third, is in turn nonetheless a relation, relating to that which has established the entire relation. . . .
>
> This, then, is the formula that describes the state of the self when despair is entirely eradicated: in relating to itself, and in willing to be itself, the self is grounded transparently in the power that established it.[i]

This is a famously difficult passage, difficult in Danish, and difficult as well to translate, because the content itself is difficult to grasp. Kierkegaard might argue that grasping God's creation of the world and of human beings is at least equally difficult to grasp as humanity's plunge into the dizziness of despair, or, as he explains it in Christian categories, as *sin*. Earlier, in *The Concept of Anxiety*, which appeared in June 1844, only eight months after the publication of *Fear and Trembling*, Kierkegaard had discussed a related dizziness. But five years later—an eternity on Kierkegaard's authorial time line—in *The Sickness unto Death*, the question of sin was to receive a more systematic and specifically Christian treatment. It is helpful to see the present work as a sort of parallel to the beginning of the book of Genesis, where without explanation or further ado, everything comes out of nothing. Creation, of course, is soon followed by the Fall, in which a failure to heed God's command is responsible for situating humanity in its continuing unhappy state. In *The Sickness unto Death*, Kierkegaard provides, as a sort of anti-Genesis, a schematic description of the human self and of despair, which is the omnipresent possibility of disorder in the self. In the book of Genesis we begin with the world and with no explanation of how it came to be other than that God said so and made it such. Immediately thereafter, we have the Fall, once again without any "explanation." Kierkegaard's parallel to the Genesis narrative is to present the "self" as a "synthesis," placed here (or "posited") by God, a synthesis whose proper task and destiny is to "ground" itself "transparently [i.e., self-consciously] in the power that established it [i.e., God]." The self, then, is a possibility whose task it is to realize (i.e., consciously embrace) its true origin, nature, and destiny.

Specifically, the self is a synthesis of three sets of contrasting characteristics: finite/infinite, temporal/eternal, freedom/necessity. The human self, in other words, is a synthesis of a finite, temporal, and necessary aspect *as well as* an infinite, eternal, and free aspect of one and the same being. But that is not all. Because this synthesis is capable of "relating to" itself, it is thus a *self-relating* synthesis of these contrasting aspects—that is, the self is a "relation." Furthermore, the self-as-self-relating-synthesis is not an entity but a *capacity*: the self is "*that* the relation relates to itself." As a capacity, a possibility, a potential, the self is perhaps better understood as a verb than as a noun. But that is *still* not all, because, as Anti-Climacus informs us, there is one additional, and indispensable, level to the self, and this additional level involves an *obligation*: as a part of its relating to itself, i.e., its consciousness of itself, the self must recognize that it has been "established by another," that is, by what we call God, and that, in order to be healthy and complete, the self must "relate to itself" and "will to be itself" in such a manner that, in so doing, the self is "grounded transparently in the power that established it," that the self consciously rests in God.

The self, then, is an activity *and* an obligation, that is, a task, and, at various points in the book, Anti-Climacus specifically refers to the self as such:

> The self is the conscious synthesis of infinitude and finitude that relates to itself, whose task is to become itself, which can only be done in the relation to God, [and thus become] entirely present and simultaneous . . . with itself in that small portion of the task that can be accomplished right now, so that in being infinitized, it in the strictest sense comes back to itself, so that in being *farthest away* from itself (when it is most infinitized in purpose and decision) it is at that same instant *nearest* itself in accomplishing that infinitely small portion of the work which can be accomplished even today, even at this hour, even at this instant.[i]

If a self fails to fulfill its obligation to become itself, this is owing to "despair." This despair can be either that of "weakness" or that of "defiance." There are varying levels of "weak" despair, which Anti-

Climacus presents to us in ascending order as the level of consciousness increases. When the despairing self becomes conscious of its existence "before God," as happens halfway through Anti-Climacus's schematic description of despair, the self—and the depiction of despair—undergoes a qualitative transformation, entering into the realm of specifically Christian definitions, and despair is now defined as "sin."

In this way, Kierkegaard's pseudonym presents us with an anthropology in which a human being's defining characteristic is "spirit"—not body, or mind ("psyche"). The spirit is a *capacity* and therefore always a potential *activity*, while the mind and the body are *things*, givens. "Spirit"—which is the defining element of the "self"—is also a "given," but in a quite different sense: it is a God-given *capacity* that can be either accepted or stifled, either by being ignored (i.e., in "weakness") or by being rejected (i.e., in "defiance"). *The Sickness unto Death*, then, is not only a dense, laconic, schematic—Anti-Climacus calls it "algebraic"—argument but also a dramatic "medical" history of the course of a sickness, a continuing crescendo culminating, as all medical histories do, in a "crisis," a turning point, at which the patient, the self, opts for salvation or extinction.

On the title page, *The Sickness unto Death* is described as "A Christian Psychological Exposition for Edification and Awakening." The book, then, is "psychological," and to that extent, a neutral, objective exposition, but it is also "for edification and awakening," and its tenor and intention are consequently by no means neutral or objective, but are instead intended to "awaken," and thus, to alarm and strengthen ("edify") the reader as a *subject*. Accordingly, Anti-Climacus does not shy away from using straightforwardly Christian terminology in explaining that a person's failure to accept and become the full possibility of the self—whether through weakness or defiance—constitutes *sin*. This is also why Anti-Climacus repeatedly emphasizes that in Christianity, unlike the pagan world of classical antiquity, "the opposite of sin is not virtue, but faith."[i] Furthermore, as Anti-Climacus insists:

> The opposition: sin—faith is the Christian one which refashions all ethical concepts in a Christian manner, providing them with an additional extension of their range. This opposition rests upon the decisive Christian stipulation "before God," a determinant which in

> turn includes the decisive Christian criterion: the absurd, the paradox, the possibility of offense. . . . Where, then, is the possibility of offense in this? It is that a human being should have this reality: the reality of existing, as *an individual* human being, directly before God, and therefore, in turn, what follows from this: that a human being's sin should be of concern to God.[i]

Thus, as he approaches the climax of his exposition, Anti-Climacus repeatedly points out that the greatest danger confronting the individual—who has made his way through the levels of sickness charted in his "algebraic" schema, who has arrived at the decisive turning point, and who is thus in critical condition—is the risk or possibility of "offense." That the infinite, almighty God should take such an interest in an individual human being seems, to a human being, to make no sense at all; it seems absurd, a paradox, a mockery, something at which one might take offense. Therefore, as Anti-Climacus explains, if indeed God is truly to approach a person, "there is an infinite qualitative difference between God and human beings [that] constitutes the possibility of offense, which cannot be taken away." Human beings are always in danger of being "offended" because of the absurd and "paradoxical" fact that "out of love, God becomes a human being [and] assumes the form of a lowly servant," who then says to us:

> "Look here, . . . and learn with certainty what it is to be a human being; ah, but take care, for I am also God—blessed the person who is not offended in me. . . . I am this particular, lowly human being, poor, forsaken, delivered into the hands of human beings—blessed the person who is not offended in me. I, this lowly human being, am the one who makes the deaf hear, the blind see, the lame walk, who cleanses lepers, who causes the dead to arise—blessed the person who is not offended in me."[i]

Thus, "the possibility of offense" is always present when God, in love, attempts to approach a human being on the human level. And as we have seen, this possibility "cannot be taken away." There is a kind of symmetry here: when God approaches a human being on the human level, the difference between God and humanity is so great that there is always a

possibility that a person can feel that they are being made a fool of, and for that reason can abandon and denounce Christianity "*modo ponendo*" (definitely, positively). This is "the sin against the Holy Spirit," the apex of despair, the end of the line, the point at which "the sickness unto death" definitively ends with the death of the spirit. The alternative, according to Anti-Climacus, is simply "faith," an acceptance that God is so loving and merciful that he can and has become a human being.

Kierkegaard's argument here makes it possible for the reader to grasp the point he made in his journal about a year after the publication of *The Sickness unto Death*: "Truly, the difficulty is not, when absolutely feeling one's wretchedness, to grasp the consolation of Christianity. . . . No, the difficulty is to become so miserable as to want to risk discovering one's own wretchedness. To be made healthy by the aid of Christianity is not the difficulty; the difficulty is to become truly and thoroughly sick."[ii]

* * *

The Sickness unto Death is Anti-Climacus's compact, systematic —"algebraic"—treatise on the subjects of sin and faith, but it is also a book by Søren Kierkegaard, and like everything (or almost everything) he wrote, it should also be understood in the context of his time and place, mid-nineteenth-century Europe, and Denmark in particular. It does not require a great deal of digging for a reader to discover in *The Sickness unto Death* a continuation of Kierkegaard's polemic, begun in *Fear and Trembling*, against what he perceived as the shallow self-satisfaction of his times. In the eighteenth century, Denmark, like much of Western Europe, had experienced significant economic growth and a corresponding growth of confidence in human reason, a development known as the Enlightenment, a label that the age, not insignificantly, applied to itself. It stuck, and the nineteenth century, with its extraordinary progress in science, engineering, and—as many thought—in social and political arrangements, was widely regarded as a continuation of the Enlightenment. In the course of a few decades, enormous advances in such scientific disciplines as chemistry, physics, mathematics, astronomy, and medicine were paralleled by what seemed like an instantaneous transformation of everyday life: railroads and

steamships radically altered previous notions of distance; the telegraph made communication, which previously had taken days or weeks, virtually immediate; and it was a widely held belief that this sort of “progress” also applied to the social and political world of human beings—we were getting better and better.

Kierkegaard was more than merely skeptical about the appellation “Enlightenment.” He made this clear in a journal entry from late in 1854, in which he mocks his “enlightened” age for the hypocritical manner in which it trivializes religion:

The Enlightened Nineteenth Century

> Fundamentally, this is, after all, awfully pitiful: For most people Christianity is really mythology, fable, poetry, they don’t consider it to be anything else—and then, in addition, it is their religion! That is to say that they don’t in fact have the courage to renounce it, that with respect to the most important matter, they don’t have enough energy to break with it in order either to go without religion altogether or to look for another.
>
> This is the state of affairs in the enlightened nineteenth century—because the number of those who are in one sense honest, the declared freethinkers, is in no way greater in our time than in an earlier period.
>
> The enlightened nineteenth century—well, yes, gas lighting is in fact also an invention of our time, and it is doubtless from this that the century gets its name. For this business with Christianity is really the most pitiful possible. Not the grossest superstition, if it at least fulfills these people’s lives and is what they believe, not the most obdurate unbelief, if it at least has character, is anything in comparison to this pitifulness: that something a person himself regards as fable is also that person’s religion. They have their children baptized, instructed in Christianity, confirmed; when they themselves are to die they have the priest called, want to be buried as Christians—and, in addition to this, they regard Christianity, fundamentally, as fable.[i]

Clearly, then, in addition to being a tightly argued and systematically presented "exposition" concerning the structure of the self and the nature and origin of sin, *The Sickness unto Death* is also a critique of Kierkegaard's modern, "enlightened" times and of self-satisfied "Christian society"—or, as Anti-Climacus frequently calls it, "Christendom," which he contrasts with pre-Christian classical civilization, or "paganism." Indeed, Anti-Climacus contends, from a spiritual point of view, modern Christendom—that is, "the paganism within Christendom"—is even further from "being spirit" (i.e., from affirmatively embracing the possibility of being the self a person has been given by God) than was classical paganism, inasmuch as "paganism indeed lacks spirit, but nonetheless is oriented in the direction of spirit, whereas paganism within Christendom lacks spirit in the direction away from spirit, or by having fallen away from it, and is therefore spiritlessness in the strictest sense."[i] This is a point to which Anti-Climacus returns repeatedly in his treatise, as Kierkegaard does in his published writings and very frequently in his journals.

In discussing the social forms in which "despair"—i.e., the sickness of sin—presents, Anti-Climacus explains that despair stems either from *an absence of necessity*, so that one becomes enmeshed in fantasy, and thus everything is possible and "nothing becomes *actual*"[ii]—or from *an absence of possibility*, so that a person becomes a determinist or fatalist, for whom "everything has become necessity,"[iii] and thus nothing is possible. These two examples could be said to represent unusual, "strong" forms of despair, and are useful extremes in the explanatory model Anti-Climacus constructs. But the most common form of despair was typified in a figure quite recognizable in Kierkegaard's Copenhagen, the "bourgeois philistine":[1] a cautious, complacent, generally self-satisfied person, who avoids taking risks by going to the extreme of neither the fantast nor the fatalist, and does his best to remain optimistic—though, of course, *cautiously* so. Unlike the extreme positions occupied by the others, bourgeois philistinism (which in Anti-Climacus's presentation serves as a sort of stand-in or representative for "enlightened" Danish society, and thus for "Christendom" generally):

> believes it has possibility at its disposal, believes that it has fooled that enormous elasticity into the trap or madhouse of probability,

> believes that it holds it captive. It leads possibility about, captive in the cage of probability, exhibits it, imagining itself to be the master, not noticing that precisely by doing so it has imprisoned itself as the slave of spiritlessness and is the most wretched of all. For the person who has become lost in possibility soars with the daring of despair; the person for whom everything became necessary overreaches himself in life, crushed in despair; but bourgeois philistinism, devoid of spirit, triumphs.[i]

It is also important to note that *The Sickness unto Death* was written under the immediate influence of the popular unrest associated with the various European revolutions of 1848, and especially, of course, the relatively peaceful abolition of absolute monarchy in Denmark that took place in March of that year. In much of Europe, the spring and early summer of 1848 was characterized by popular uprisings that called for democratic, constitutional government in place of the various forms of absolute monarchy then prevalent. Denmark was no exception to this trend, and the Danish monarchy was further riven by the insistence of political activists, in the predominantly German-speaking southern duchies of Schleswig and Holstein, that the duchies be permitted to break away from Denmark and become part of a nascent confederacy of German states. Throughout the rest of Denmark, however, Danish nationalist sentiment and political liberalism held sway, exercising a particularly powerful hold on the middle and upper-middle classes in the capital city of Copenhagen. And so it came to pass that on March 21, 1848, nearly twenty thousand people, led by prominent members of Copenhagen's bourgeoisie, marched upon the government palace and presented their demands both that the government convene an assembly charged with drawing up a constitution based on popular sovereignty and that the government refuse to give in to the secessionists in the southern duchies. The king, Frederick VII, who had succeeded to the throne only two months earlier and was not a particularly strong-willed man, quickly yielded to the demands of the liberal nationalist politicians. The result was war with the German-speaking secessionists, and the promise of a convention to write a democratic constitution for the monarchy.

Just over a year later, on June 5, 1849, in the midst of continuing war with various German states and the breakaway provinces, a democratic Danish constitution was ratified. The June Constitution, as it became known, established Denmark as a constitutional monarchy governed by a parliament elected by what then may have been the most inclusive suffrage in the world. One of the hallmarks of the new constitution was that it retained an established national church. The state, formerly an absolute monarchy, was now subject to popular sovereignty and, accordingly, the established church, which had hitherto been known as "the State Church," was now written into the constitution as "the Danish People's Church" and was indeed the property of the people, subject to the vagaries of shifting majorities in the parliament. Under this new constitution, the parliament established ministries to oversee various state activities. One such ministry was the "Cultus Ministry," which was responsible for the affairs of all manner of cultural institutions, including primary and secondary education, the University of Copenhagen, the museums, the zoo, the Royal Theater, and the Danish People's Church. In a journal entry from October 1849, Kierkegaard remarks archly that "people have taken exception to the fact that the theater has been placed under the cultus minister; I think it would be better if the cultus minister kept control over what has been entrusted to him—the theater and the Church—but took the title of theater director."[i]

So the old State Church that had existed since the Reformation was now the Danish People's Church. There was no change in personnel or policy aside from the fact that the established church was now under the direction of a cabinet minister who was ultimately responsible to a popularly elected parliament. Kierkegaard regarded this as the worst possible outcome, a superficial, cultural Christianity that was part of Danish national identity, a Christianity that was the possession of the Danish people and ultimately subject to the will of a parliament elected by what was—for the time—a broadly democratic franchise. With the Danish People's Church safely ensconced in the constitution, the actual day-to-day life of official Danish Christianity was administered by an academically educated clergy that, in Kierkegaard's view, continued to live well, or comfortably, on their guaranteed positions and to be willing—as they had been under the old

absolutist State Church—to console and condescend to those who had been entrusted to their care.

In a journal entry from late May 1849, approximately a month before the manuscript of *The Sickness unto Death* went to press, Kierkegaard makes it clear that his particular target is the fact that Christianity has been transformed into "priestly chatter about a heavenly friend, the gentle doctrine of truth, the satisfying of deep longings, depth itself, and other such saccharine stuff, which the silk-clad priests serve up to their silk-clad listeners."[i] Kierkegaard much preferred "freethinkers," that is, outright atheists, to the watered-down official religion he saw as characteristic of the Danish Church. He dwells on this topic at length in a journal entry from the late summer of 1849:

That the "Christian State" Is Based on an Untruth, Not to Mention a Lie, Illustrated by the Existence of Bishop Mynster

> The "Christian state" is of course one in which all the subjects are Christians, or at least where the general run of them do not publicly confess another religion. When this is the case, there naturally emerges a firm concept of the clergy, who become civil servants just like secular civil servants, and some of them will become very lofty and distinguished as well as well-paid.
>
> When this is the case: for if it is not the case—if neither all of the subjects nor more or less the general run of them are Christian—then the Christian Church will of course be a small or a minor society in the state, and being a Christian priest would be neither a civil service position nor particularly profitable, in short, not an occupation for ambitious people.
>
> Now take Bishop Mynster. In order to be this distinguished and to be so qua clergyman, there must be a Christian state; his entire existence qua distinguished clergyman supports the concept of the "Christian state" on which it itself rests. But how, in fact, does this man live? Or what does his life express existentially? How has it been arranged and edited from its earliest days? What his life expresses is: For the sake of God in Heaven, let us not involve

> ourselves with the mass of people (in the Christian state, where of course everyone is a Christian); let us live at the greatest possible remove, and with the greatest possible distinction, from the average run of people. We preach on Sundays, but of course in the splendid house of God, secured by all possible distinction: "Out there—no, I must take care not to preach there." . . .
>
> He profits from the illusion that this is a Christian state (the profit is to be bishop, the supreme civil servant, having offices and other delights within his gift, great revenues), and existentially he expresses that the great mass of people are as far as possible from being Christians, but are crude and ignorant rabble.
>
> Look, this is the Christian state. What is true here of Bishop Mynster is true with respect to more or less every clergyman in the capital.[i]

There is no doubt that *The Sickness unto Death* is, in addition to everything else, very much a political book, conceived by Kierkegaard as a response both to the general tenor of his times—with his contemporaries' view of themselves as "enlightened"—and to the specific political and ecclesiastical upheavals that culminated in 1848–1849. So, although Kierkegaard does not mention Bishop Jacob Peter Mynster by name in the text of *The Sickness unto Death*, there can be no doubt that it is Mynster to whom Anti-Climacus is referring when he writes:

> Ah, when one sees a person who gives assurances that he has understood completely how Christ went about in the form of a lowly servant, poor, despised, mocked, as Scripture says: spat upon—when I then see that same person so painstakingly seek out the place where, in the worldly sense, it is pleasant to be, and ensconce himself there in complete security, when I see him so anxiously—as if it were a matter of life and death—avoiding every unfavorable gust of wind from the right or left, so happy, so extremely happy, so madly happy—indeed, to top it off, so madly happy that, profoundly moved, he even thanks God for it—for being unreservedly honored and esteemed by everyone, everyone.[i]

*
* *

Nonetheless, while he does not shy away from criticizing "Christendom," with its hired clergy and its "bourgeois philistine" adherents, Kierkegaard also targets *himself*. In his journals from the period preceding and immediately following the publication of *The Sickness unto Death*, he makes it clear that as a spectator and critical analyst of his social and religious environment, he is nonetheless part of the problem—a "poet," rather than someone who takes action. In a journal entry written during the first half of July 1849, when *The Sickness unto Death* was in press, Kierkegaard notes: "At first I thought of adding a postscript [to *The Sickness unto Death*] by the editor [i.e., Kierkegaard himself]. But . . . one can see that I myself am already present in the book, e.g., the part about the poet of the religious."[i] Several months later, in mid-November 1849, Kierkegaard again took up the matter in his journal, noting that in *The Sickness unto Death*, "perhaps there ought to have been a tiny little postscript by the editor as originally intended, e.g., *Editor's Postscript*. This book is as if written by a physician; I, the editor, am not the physician, I am one of the sick."[ii] (Subsequently, in the period between publication of *The Sickness unto Death* and the furious attack on "Christendom" that Kierkegaard waged from 1854 until his death in the autumn of 1855, Kierkegaard made what he understood to be a move from writing "poetry" to taking concrete action.)

As can be seen from its table of contents, *The Sickness unto Death*, despite its relative brevity, is divided, subdivided, sub-subdivided, etc. into a great many sections, carefully arranged in a complex hierarchy and sequence. The overall architecture of the book is clear: it is divided into two "Parts," with the first "Part" arguing or demonstrating that "the sickness unto death is despair," and the second "Part" extending the demonstration, arguing that "despair is sin." There is therefore a major division between the First Part and the Second Part, and it is clear to the reader that despite this discontinuity, there is nonetheless an internal continuity insofar as Anti-Climacus, the putative author, suddenly displays what looks like a curiously personal-sounding concern with the problem of an individual who is plagued by a "thorn in the flesh," which torments him and which, at the

same time, the individual cannot—or does not want to—be rid of. Of course, this mysterious, embedded suffering recalls that of St. Paul, but we also know that such suffering—and this particular term for it—recurs at many points in Kierkegaard's writings, both published and unpublished. In one of the journal entries cited above, Kierkegaard is quite open about admitting that he himself is "present in the book" in "the part about the poet of the religious," which is found at the very beginning of the Second Part. As we will see, right at the beginning of the Second Part (in which the reader enters into specifically Christian territory where the category of "sin" is present), Anti-Climacus launches into a discussion of "the poet of the religious" in which he grapples with the problem of the thorn in the flesh. However, it is equally interesting to note that a vigorous discussion of someone with a "thorn in the flesh" is also found immediately preceding this passage, at the very end of the First Part (which concerns itself not with sin, but with the general category of "despair"). Thus the bridge between the book's two major divisions is its discussion of a person who clings to his "thorn in the flesh." Kierkegaard has identified himself with the latter portion of this discussion, and it is difficult to see how the former portion is not to be read in a similarly autobiographical manner.

What follows is an abbreviated excerpt from the concluding portion of the First Part of *The Sickness unto Death*:

> Perhaps, when it is tentatively orienting itself in its concrete self, an experimenting self such as this, which in despair wills to be itself, runs into one or another difficulty, something that the Christian would call a cross, a fundamental impairment, whatever it might be. . . . [I]n Promethean fashion, the infinite, negative self feels itself to be nailed fast to this servitude. . . . [It is a] form of despair that despairs over the earthly or over something earthly. . . . But it is also a form of despair to be unwilling to hope in the possibility that an earthly suffering, a temporal cross, can be taken away. Now, this is something this despairing person, who in despair wills to be himself, is unwilling to do. If he has convinced himself that this thorn in the flesh (whether it is actually present or his passion makes it seem to him that it is) gnaws so deeply that he is unable to abstract from it, then he wills, as it were, to make it a part of himself for eternity. So

> he is offended by it, or rather, he lets it serve as the occasion to be offended at the whole of existence: then he wills to be himself in spite of it, not be himself in spite of it without it (that, of course, would be to abstract from it, and that he cannot do—or it would be movement in the direction of resignation): no, in spite of, or in defiance of, all of existence, he wills to be himself along with it, he wills to take it along with himself, almost defying his agony.[i]

This is how the First Part of *The Sickness unto Death* ends, with its ultimate development of the concept of despair. Then, immediately thereafter, comes the Second Part, which makes the case that despair is *sin*, thus taking the reader into the specifically *Christian* part of the "exposition." In the Second Part, despite its clear separation from the part that preceded it, Anti-Climacus begins with a continuation of what seems clearly to be Kierkegaard's autobiographical theme, depicting "a poet-existence tending toward the religious," a person who refuses to let himself be healed.

> Even though the present part, and least of all section A, is not the place for psychological sketches (nor is there room for such), mention may nonetheless be made here of the most dialectical boundary area between despair and sin—of what could be called a poet-existence tending toward the religious. . . . A poet of this sort can have a very deep religious craving, and the conception of God is incorporated in his despair. He loves God above everything, God who is his only consolation in his secret agony, and yet he loves the agony—he will not let go of it. . . . As a person unhappy in love became a poet blissfully praising the happiness of love, *he* became the poet of religiousness. . . . In relation to the religious he is an unhappy lover; that is, he is not a believer in strict sense; he possesses only the first part of faith: despair—and in it a fervent longing for the religious. His conflict is really this: Has he been called? Does the thorn in the flesh mean that he is to be used for the extraordinary? Before God, is it entirely in order that he has become this extraordinary person? Or is the thorn in the flesh something

> under which he is to humble himself in order to attain what is universally human?[i]

Thus, the autobiographical element quite visibly and deliberately bridges the divide between the First and Second Parts. Kierkegaard's argument concerning the nature and tenacity of the despair that is sin is clearly intended to apply to everyone, including the author himself, who, as we have seen, appropriately "positioned [him]self above J[ohannes] C[limacus], below Anti-C[limacus]."

* * *

Kierkegaard's *The Sickness unto Death* is tough, systematic, and brilliant in its rigorous investigation of the human soul. It spares no one, and certainly not its author. It presents God as love, as what T. S. Eliot terms an "infinitely gentle, infinitely suffering thing," yet it is also a love that is rigorous and demanding, a love that sees through all efforts at deception, especially—and worst of all—self-deception. *The Sickness unto Death* presents a Christianity stripped of all the historical accretions and emotional trappings that Kierkegaard believed had hobbled it and pressed it into the service of the "bourgeois philistines" of Danish "Christendom," and that have likewise turned it into fodder for the dangerous "evangelical" hucksterism of present-day political life. And so *The Sickness unto Death* speaks to us, even today.

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[i] Entry NB4:76 in *Kierkegaard's Journals and Notebooks* [hereafter *KJN* followed by volume and page number], 11 vols. in 12 tomes, ed. Niels Jørgen Cappelørn et al. (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2007–2020), vol. 4, p. 325.

[ii] Entry NB4:158 in *KJN* 4:360.

[i] Entry NB4:160 in *KJN* 4:365.

[ii] Entry NB4:161 in *KJN* 4:366, from May 13 or 14, 1848.

[i] Entry NB11:204 in *KJN* 6:124–25.

[ii] Entry NB11:209 in *KJN* 6:127.

[i] See pp. 19–20.

[i] See p. 42.

[i] See p. 107.
[i] See p. 107.
[i] See p. 167.
[ii] Entry NB19:25 in *KJN* 7:352.
[i] Entry NB34:42 (November 24–December 3, 1854) in *KJN* 10:362–63.
[i] See p. 61.
[ii] See p. 47.
[iii] See p. 52.
[i] See p. 54.
[i] Entry NB13:74 in *KJN* 6:321.
[i] Entry NB10:198 in *KJN* 5:374.
[i] Entry NB12:69 (July 19–September 28, 1849) in *KJN* 6:178–79.
[i] See p. 119.
[i] Entry NB11:217 in *KJN* 6:130.
[ii] Entry NB14:38 in *KJN* 6:369.
[i] See p. 91.
[i] See p. 101.

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE

"THE BOOK has a difficulty: it is too dialectical and harsh to make proper use of the rhetorical, the engaging, the enthralling."[i] This is how Kierkegaard described *The Sickness unto Death* when he was working on it in the spring of 1848, and he was right. The reader has to do a bit of searching to find "engaging" and "enthralling" passages in *The Sickness unto Death*—unlike, say, in *Fear and Trembling*, which Kierkegaard had published six years earlier. Indeed, by "rhetorical," Kierkegaard meant precisely the sort of lyrical writing that characterizes much of *Fear and Trembling* and his many collections of edifying discourses. By "dialectical," on the other hand, Kierkegaard meant a systematic, organized argument (Kierkegaard's pseudonym Anti-Climacus calls it an "exposition") like that which comprises *The Sickness unto Death*—see, for example, the extremely detailed "Contents" section that in the original Danish edition was placed directly following Kierkegaard's "Preface" (in the present translation, that "Contents" section is on page 7, following the Foreword). Even a brief inspection of the "Contents" section, with its complex hierarchy of divisions and subdivisions, lays bare what Kierkegaard termed the "algebraic" organization and compression that he imposed upon his presentation. (So complex, in fact, was the plan of Kierkegaard's argument that at a few points he seems to lose his otherwise perfect overview of the whole, and a sharp-eyed reader will detect places where the internal headings that appear in the body of Anti-Climacus's argument don't quite match up with the wording assigned to them in the Contents.)

As is often the case in Kierkegaard's writing, it is not unusual to find sentences that are quite long and that seem convoluted, or even contorted, in their attempt to present the various points of his argument. This confronts the translator with a difficult choice: Should such sentences be broken up

into several shorter sentences? Or should the length of such sentences be preserved while their syntax and structure are adjusted in order to convey Kierkegaard's meaning while retaining the overall feel of his exposition? In translating "rhetorical" works, I have often chosen to break up Kierkegaard's extraordinarily long sentences, but in the present case, with a book as "dialectical" as *The Sickness unto Death*, I have generally chosen to allow lengthy sentences to remain lengthy, and have attempted to preserve their meaning and the flow of Kierkegaard's exposition by adjusting his nineteenth-century Danish syntax to the conventions of modern English usage.

In presenting his case, Kierkegaard makes frequent use of the Danish noun *Bestemmelse* (cognate of the German *Bestimmung*). Along with its verbal, adjectival, and adverbial forms, *Bestemmelse* appears in this little book about a hundred times. Its polysemy presents a unique challenge to the translator, offering them a welter of possible meanings and translations to choose from. The term is typically concerned with definition and categorization, though it can also mean "destination" and quite a number of other things—for example, "classification," "specification," "qualification," "determination," "aspect," "characterization," and their various related forms—and Kierkegaard's penchant for using the term was perhaps owing to its very malleability. Another term that appears with great frequency is *Begreb* (cognate of the German *Begriff*), though this term is relatively unproblematic and in the present volume has most often been translated as "concept," while its verb forms have generally been rendered as forms of "comprehend" and occasionally as forms of "grasp." Other specialized terms preferred by Kierkegaard present fewer problems. Unsurprisingly, "speculation" and "speculative," which Kierkegaard tends to use in a negative or pejorative sense, refer to Hegel and Hegel-inspired philosophy and theology.

The present translation is based on the new standard Danish critical edition of Kierkegaard's works, *Søren Kierkegaards Skrifter* (hereafter *SKS*, followed by volume and page number), ed. Niels Jørgen Cappelørn et al., 55 vols. (28 text volumes accompanied by 27 volumes of commentary) (Copenhagen: Gad, 1997–2012), volume 11 (2006), pp. 113–242; page numbers enclosed in hash marks and square brackets—e.g., #[100]#—indicate the start of the corresponding page in *SKS*. The editors of *SKS*

chose the first printing of the first Danish edition of *Sygdommen til Døden* as the principal text, collating three selected copies in order to control for typographical variants, of which none were found. Then, in determining substantive variants, the editors of *SKS* compared the above-mentioned copy of the first printed edition with a wealth of Kierkegaard's draft materials, the surviving fair copy as submitted to the printer, and the printer's proofs, which are marked up with corrections, both in Kierkegaard's hand and in that of his amanuensis, Israel Levin. Because the editors of *SKS* know that Kierkegaard read through those printer's proofs of the first edition and made corrections and changes to the version he had submitted as the fair copy, they accept the first printed edition as the principal basis text and note variants between it, the marked-up proofs, Kierkegaard's fair copy as submitted to the printer, and, on occasion, Kierkegaard's earlier drafts. In the present translation, a number of the more important variants are noted in footnotes on the pages in which they appear.

Foreign, non-German language that appears in the text is translated in footnotes, and references or allusions to biblical passages are also clarified in footnotes, while lengthier explanations of matters in the text appear as endnotes, some of which have been adapted, often in abbreviated form, from the notes in commentary volume (vol. K11) of *SKS*. In presenting his case, Kierkegaard occasionally refers the reader to earlier portions of the text by mentioning the relevant part, section, subsection, etc. of his complex argument. These references are clarified in footnotes that provide page numbers of the passages in question.

I am happy to acknowledge my indebtedness to previous translations of Kierkegaard's *The Sickness unto Death*: Walter Lowrie (1941), whose translation I read as a university student and later; Howard and Edna Hong (1980), whose translation I taught in American college classrooms; and Alastair Hannay (1989), whose translation I have also read carefully and learned from. I hope, of course, that my translation is an improvement on the high standard set by those who have gone before, just as I assume that a future translator will be able to improve on the present one. As I have noted in the past, I am fully in agreement with Robert Frost's view that everyone works together, "whether they work together or apart."

I am also happy to express my thanks for the support and assistance I have received in connection with my work. The Søren Kierkegaard

Research Centre at the Theology Faculty of the University of Copenhagen, its director, Joakim Garff, and my other colleagues at the university have been supportive in many ways and have provided an ideal work environment. My longtime friend and colleague, emeritus professor Niels Jørgen Cappelørn, provided valuable counsel and much needed assistance in solving a number of textual “puzzles.” My friend Jamie Lorentzen gave the entire text a careful and perceptive reading, catching more than a few gaffes. My wife, Margaret Ryan Hellman, went through the manuscript with great patience and care, and I am very thankful for that and for much more.

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[i] Entry NB4:160 in *KJN* 4:365.

#115#

The Sickness unto Death

A CHRISTIAN PSYCHOLOGICAL EXPOSITION FOR EDIFICATION AND AWAKENING

BY

ANTI-CLIMACUS[i]

EDITED BY

S. KIERKEGAARD

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[i] "Anticlimacus" is the pseudonym Kierkegaard chose as a contrast to "Johannes Climacus" (Latin, "John of the Ladder"), the pseudonym Kierkegaard credited as author of *Philosophical Fragments* (published in 1844) and *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* (1846), as well as *De omnibus dubitandum est* (published posthumously). "Climacus" is derived from the Greek κλιμακς [ladder], because Johannes Climacus ascended a ladder step by step in developing his argument. "Anti-Climacus" connotes the reverse, in which the higher one climbs, the greater one's imperfection. See Kierkegaard's letter of August 4, 1849, to Rasmus Nielsen in *Kierkegaard: Letters and Documents*, trans. Henrik Rosenmeier, vol. 25 of *Kierkegaard's Writings* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1978), pp. 310–11, in which Kierkegaard corrects a misunderstanding of the name.

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Herr! gibe uns blöde Augen
für Dinge, die nichts taugen
und Augen voller Klarheit
in alle deine Wahrheit.[i]

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[i] German, "Lord, give us weak eyes for things of no worth, and clear eyes for all your truth." See *Søren Kierkegaards Papirer* [The Papers of Søren Kierkegaard], 2nd ed., vols. 1–16 in 25 tomes, ed. P. A. Heiberg, V. Kuhr, and E. Torsting (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1909–1978)—hereafter *Pap.* followed by volume, entry, and page number—where Kierkegaard writes: "N.B. This could perhaps be placed on the verso page" (VIII^2 B: 171, 6), and he attributes it to "a sermon of Bishop Albertini, in *Handbuch deutscher Beredsamkeit* [Manual of German Eloquence], Dr. O.L.B. Wolff (Leipzig, 1845), part one, p. 293." The editors of *SKS* have traced the source of the four lines of poetry cited by Kierkegaard to an anonymous hymn that was printed as no. 831 in *Des kleinen Brüder-Gesangbuchs Dritter Theil, enthaltende eine abermalige Samlung alter und neuer Verse* [The Small Hymnal of the Brethren, Part Three, Containing a Renewed Collection of Older and More Recent Verse] (Barby, 1767). Likewise, the editors of *SKS* state that in Johannes Plitt, *Historische Nachricht vom Brüder-Gesangbuche des Jahres 1778, und von dessen Lieder-Verfassern* [Historical Report on the Brethren Hymnals Through the Year 1778 and on the Authors of Their Songs] (Gnadau, 1835), pp. 83 and 186, it is asserted that the author of the verse was Count Nicolaus Ludwig von Zinzendorf (1700–1760), the founder of the pietistic movement known as the Moravian Brethren, which, incidentally, was influential in the religious life of the Kierkegaard family—though Kierkegaard only knew the verse, from Wolff, as coming from Albertini's sermon.

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FOREWORD

The form of this “exposition” will perhaps strike many people as curious; it will seem to them too rigorous to be edifying, and too edifying to be strictly scholarly. With respect to this latter point, I have no opinion. As for the former point, that is not my view of it, and if it were in fact too rigorous to be edifying, then, in my view, that would be a flaw. For of course, it is one thing that it cannot be edifying for everyone, because not everyone possesses the prerequisites needed in order to be able to follow it; that it has the character of being edifying is another matter. Indeed, from the Christian point of view everything, everything ought to serve for edification.[i] Scholarliness of the sort that is not, ultimately, edifying is for that very reason precisely unchristian. In its presentation, everything Christian ought to be like the physician’s words beside the sickbed; even if they are understood only by those with medical training, it nonetheless ought never be forgotten that they are spoken beside the sickbed. This is the relation of Christianity to life (as opposed to a scholarly remove from life), or this, the ethical aspect of Christianity, is precisely what is edifying, and the manner of its presentation, however rigorous it might otherwise be, is entirely different, qualitatively different, from the sort of scholarliness that is “indifferent,” the scholarliness whose lofty heroism is, from a Christian point of view, so far removed from being heroism that, from a Christian point of view, it is a species of inhuman curiosity. It is Christian heroism—and indeed, it is perhaps seen quite rarely—to dare to be oneself entirely, an individual human being, this particular individual human being, alone before God, alone in that enormous effort and that enormous responsibility;

but it is not Christian heroism to be fooled by the abstract notion of pure humanity in itself, or to play "Guess Who?" with world history.[1] However rigorous its form is in other respects, all Christian knowledge ought to be concerned; but this concern is precisely what edifies. The concern is the relation to life, to the actuality of the personality, and is thus, from the Christian point of view, seriousness; from the Christian point of view, the # **[118]#** loftiness of indifferent knowledge is far from being greater seriousness—it is, from the Christian point of view, jest and vanity. But, again, seriousness is what edifies.

Therefore, in one sense, this little book is of the sort that could have been written by a college undergraduate, though in another sense, perhaps not every professor could write it.

But the fact that the treatise appears in this form is at least evidence of its having been well thought through, and it is surely correct from a psychological standpoint as well. There is a more solemn style that is so solemn that it does not mean very much and which, when a person is altogether too accustomed to it, easily ends up saying nothing at all.

Just one additional remark, most likely superfluous, but I am nonetheless willing to take that upon myself: I want to point out, once and for all, that, as the title of course indicates, throughout this entire work, despair is understood as the sickness, not as the means of recovery. Indeed, that is how dialectical despair is. Thus, too, in Christian terminology death is the expression for the greatest spiritual misery, and yet the cure is precisely to die, to die away.[2]

—1848

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[i] See 1 Cor. 14:26.

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[i] Kierkegaard here uses "position" in the technical philosophical sense, as something "posited," i.e., asserted or affirmed as a given that is not further reducible.

[ii] Latin, "in the manner that affirms or posits," i.e., positively.

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INTRODUCTION

"This sickness is not unto death" (John 11:4). And yet Lazarus indeed died, for the disciples misunderstood what Christ later added—"Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I am going there to awaken him" (11:11)—he told them plainly, "Lazarus is dead" (11:14). So Lazarus is dead, and yet this sickness was not unto death; he was dead, and yet this sickness is not unto death. Now, we know well that Christ was thinking of the miracle that would cause his contemporaries, "if they could believe, to see the glory of God" (11:40), the miracle by which he awakened Lazarus from the dead, so not only was "this sickness" not unto death, but was, as Christ had foretold, "to the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified through it" (11:4): Oh, but even if Christ had not awakened Lazarus, would it not still be true that this sickness, death itself, is not unto death? When Christ comes to the grave and with a loud voice, calls, "Lazarus, come out" (11:43), it is of course quite clear that "this" sickness is not unto death. But if Christ had not said this—the mere fact that he, who is "the resurrection and the life" (11:25), had come to the grave, doesn't that mean that this sickness is not unto death: the fact that Christ exists, doesn't that mean that *this* sickness is not unto death! And what good would it have done Lazarus to have been awakened from the dead, if, finally, it had to end with him dying—what good would it have done Lazarus if he were not, he who is the resurrection and the life for everyone **#[124]#** who believes in him! No, not because Lazarus was awakened from the dead, that is not why one can say that *this* sickness is not unto death, but because he exists—that is why this sickness is not unto death. For, humanly speaking, death is the last of all things, and

humanly speaking, there is only hope as long as there is life.[i] But as Christianity views it, death is by no means the last of all things, is indeed only a minor event within that which is all, an eternal life; and as Christianity views it, in death there is infinitely more hope than when, in merely human terms, not only is there life, but this life in the greatest of health and vigor.

Thus, as Christianity views it, not even death is "the sickness unto death"—even less, then, all these things that are called earthly and temporal suffering: want, sickness, misery, distress, difficulties, suffering, mental affliction, sorrow, grief. And even if such things were so burdensome and painful that we human beings, or at any rate, that the suffering person, was to say, "this is worse than death"—for the Christian understanding, all such things (which, even though they are not sickness, can be compared with a sickness) are nonetheless not the sickness unto death.

That is how nobly Christianity has taught the Christian to think of everything earthly and worldly, death included. It is almost as though the Christian might feel superior because of this proud elevation above everything that people otherwise call misfortune, above what people otherwise call the greatest evil. But then Christianity has in turn discovered a misery which the human being, as such, does not know exists; this misery is the sickness unto death. The things which the natural human being reckons as appalling—when he has gone through them all and knows of no more he can name: for the Christian, they are like a joke. Such is the relation of the natural human being to the Christian—it is like the relation of a child to a man: what the child shrinks from in terror is viewed as nothing by the man. The child does not know what is horrifying; the man does know, and he is appalled by it. The child's imperfection is, first, not knowing what is horrifying, and then, as a part of this, shrinking from # **[125]#** what is not horrifying. And thus, too, with the natural human being: he is ignorant of what is truly horrifying, and yet he is not thereby freed from shuddering—no, he shudders at what is not horrifying. It is like the pagan's relation to God: he does not know the true God—but as if that weren't enough: he worships an idol as God.

Only the Christian knows what is meant by the sickness unto death. As a Christian, he has been the recipient of a courage that the natural human

being does not know—he acquired this courage by learning to fear what is even more horrifying. A person always acquires courage in this way: when one fears a greater danger, a person always has courage to confront a lesser one—when a person infinitely fears one danger, it is as if the others did not exist. But the horrifying thing that the Christian has learned to know is “the sickness unto death.”

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[i] See Eccles. 9:4.

#[127]#

FIRST PART

The Sickness unto Death Is Despair

#[129]#

A

THAT DESPAIR IS THE SICKNESS UNTO DEATH

A

Despair is a sickness in the spirit, in the self, and can thus be threefold: in despair not to be conscious of having a self (not properly despair); in despair not to will to be oneself; in despair to will to be oneself

A HUMAN BEING IS spirit. But what is spirit? Spirit is the self. But what is the self? The self is a relation that relates to itself, or it is that in the relation which is the relation's relating to itself. The self is not the relation but is *that* the relation relates to itself. A human being is a synthesis of the infinite and the finite, of the temporal and the eternal, of freedom and necessity, in short, a synthesis. A synthesis is a relation between two terms. Considered in this way, a human being is not yet a self.

In a relation between two, the relation is the third as a negative unity, and the two relate to the relation, and in the relation to the relation; thus, under the aspect of psyche, the relation between psyche and body is a relation. On the other hand, if the relation relates to itself, then this relation is the positive third, and this is the self.

Such a relation that relates to itself, a self, must either have established itself or have been established[1] by another.

If the relation that relates to itself has been established by another, then the relation is surely the third, but this relation, the third, is in turn nonetheless a relation, relating to that which has established the entire relation. **#[130]#**

Such a derived, established relation is the human self, a relation that relates to itself and, in relating to itself, relates to another. This is the reason that there can be two forms of genuine despair. If the human self had established itself, there could be talk of only one form, that of not willing to be oneself, of willing to be rid of oneself, but there could not be talk of the form: in despair to will to be oneself. This formula is in fact the expression for the relation's (the self's) total dependence, the expression of the fact that the self cannot of itself come to or be in equilibrium and rest, but only, in relating to itself, by relating to that which has established the entire relation. Indeed, so far is it from being the case that this second form of despair (in despair to will to be oneself) merely designates a specific form of despair, that, on the contrary, all despair can in the end be resolved into it and traced back to it. If someone in despair is (as he believes) attentive to his despair, he does not speak meaninglessly of it as something that happens to him (more or less as when, owing to a nervous delusion, a person who suffers from vertigo speaks of a weight on his head or that it is as if something had fallen onto him, etc., a weight or pressure which, however, is not something external, but an inverted reflection of something internal)—and then, on his own and solely by himself, wants to abolish the despair using all his might: then he is still in despair and with all his supposed efforts is merely working himself all the more deeply into a deeper despair. The misrelation of despair is not a simple misrelation, but a misrelation in a relation that relates to itself and that is established by an other, so that the misrelation in this for-itself relation also reflects itself infinitely in the relation to the power that established it.

This, then, is the formula that describes the state of the self when despair is entirely eradicated: in relating to itself, and in willing to be itself, the self is grounded transparently in the power that established it.

B

The Possibility and Actuality of Despair

Is despair an advantage or a defect? From a purely dialectical standpoint, it is both. If one wanted to grasp the abstract idea of despair without thinking of any despairing person, one would have to say that it is an enormous # **[131]#** advantage. The possibility of this sickness is the human being's advantage over the animal, and this advantage distinguishes him in a manner quite different from the upright gait,[2] for it indicates the infinite uprightness or elevation of his being spirit. The possibility of this sickness is the human being's advantage over the animal; to be aware of this sickness is the Christian's advantage over the natural human being; to be cured of this sickness is the Christian's blessedness.

Thus, to be able to despair is an infinite advantage, and yet to be in despair is not merely the greatest misfortune and misery—no, it is perdition. The relation between possibility and actuality is not like this in other situations: if it is an advantage to be able to be something, then it is an even greater advantage to be it—to be something is like an ascent in relation to being able to be something. With despair, on the other hand, being in despair is like a fall in relation to the possibility of being in despair: as infinite as is the advantage of the *possibility* of being in despair, the fall of *being* in despair is equally deep. Thus, in relation to despair, not being in it is an ascent. Yet here, once again, this category is ambiguous. Not being in despair is not like not being lame, blind, or the like. If not being in despair means neither more nor less than not being in despair, then it means precisely to be in it. Not being in despair must mean the annihilated possibility of being able to be in despair; if this is true, then in order for a person not to be in despair he must annihilate despair at every moment. This is not how possibility relates to actuality in other circumstances. For it is true that thinkers say that actuality is annihilated possibility, but that is not entirely true: it is the fulfilled, the active possibility. In this case, on the contrary, it is the actuality (not being in despair) which is therefore also a negation, the impotent, annihilated possibility; in other cases, actuality relates to possibility as a confirmation—here it is a denial.

Despair is a misrelation in the relation of a synthesis that relates to itself. But the synthesis is not the misrelation, it is only the possibility—or, the possibility of the misrelation lies in the synthesis. Were the synthesis itself the misrelation, then despair would not exist at all, then despair would be something that was present in human nature as such—that is, then it would not be despair; it would be something that happened to a person, something he suffered, like an illness a person falls into, or like death, # **[132]#** which is everyone's lot. No, despairing lies in the person himself, but were he not a synthesis, he would be absolutely unable to despair; nor could he despair had the synthesis not originally come from God's hand in the right relationship.

Where, then, does despair come from? From the relation in which the synthesis relates to itself, inasmuch as God, who made the human being into this relation, lets him, as it were, slip out of his hand—that is, from the relation's relating to itself. And in this—in the fact that the relation is spirit, that it is the self—in this lies the responsibility which rests upon all despair, responsibility which rests there for every moment it exists, however much and however ingeniously and deceptively the despairing person deceives himself and others, speaking of his despair as a misfortune—confusing it with the aforementioned case of vertigo, with which despair, though qualitatively different, has much in common, for, in connection with the category of psyche, vertigo has much in common with what despair is in connection with the category of spirit, and it is teeming with analogies to despair.

Then, when the misrelation, despair, has arisen, does it follow as a matter of course that it continues? No, it does not follow as a matter of course; if the misrelation continues, it is not a consequence of the misrelation, but of the relation that relates to itself. This means that every time the misrelation manifests itself, and at every moment it exists, it must be followed back to the relation. For instance, it is said that a person brings a sickness upon himself, e.g., through carelessness. Then the sickness sets in, and from that moment it asserts itself and is now an *actuality* whose origin increasingly becomes *something in the past*. It would be both terrible and inhuman if someone were incessantly to say: "At this moment you, the sick person, are bringing this sickness upon yourself"—that is, if at every moment one were to dissolve the actuality of the sickness into its

possibility. It is true that he brought the sickness upon himself, but he did that only once; the continuation of the sickness is a simple consequence of the fact that at one time he brought it upon himself; its progress cannot at every moment be referred back to him as its cause; he brought it upon himself, but one cannot say that he *is bringing* it upon himself. It is otherwise with despair: every actual moment of despair can be traced back to possibility. Every moment he is in despair he *is bringing* it upon himself: it is always the present tense; nothing comes about in relation to an actuality that is past; at every actual moment of despair, the despairing person carries all **#[133]#** the past as something present in possibility. This is because to despair is a qualification of spirit that relates to the eternal in a person. But he cannot rid himself of the eternal, no, not in all eternity. He cannot cast it away from himself once and for all—nothing is more impossible. At every moment that he does not have it, he must have cast it, or be casting it, away from himself—but it comes back: that is, at every moment he despairs, he brings despair upon himself. For despair is not a consequence of the misrelation, but of the relation that relates to itself. And a person cannot be rid of the relation that relates to itself any more than he can be rid of his self, which, in fact, is one and the same thing, for the self is of course the relation to itself.

C

Despair is: "the sickness unto death"

THIS CONCEPT, THE SICKNESS unto death, must, however, be understood in a special sense. Understood straightforwardly, it designates a sickness of which the end, the outcome, is death. Despair cannot be called the sickness unto death in that sense. But from a Christian point of view, death itself is a transition to life. Thus, in the Christian sense, there is no earthly, bodily sickness unto death. For, of course, death is the end of the sickness, but death is not the end. If there is to be talk of a sickness unto death in the

strictest sense, it must be one in which the end is death and in which death is the end. And precisely this is despair.

Yet in another sense, despair is even more definitely the sickness unto death. Indeed, it is as far as possible from being the case that, in a straightforward sense, a person dies of this sickness or that this sickness ends with a bodily death. On the contrary, the agony of this despair consists precisely in being unable to die. Thus, it has more in common with the condition of someone who is mortally ill when he lies struggling with death and is unable to die. Thus, to be sick *unto* death is to be unable to die, yet without any hope of life—no, the hopelessness is that even the last hope, death, is not there. When death is the greatest danger, one hopes for life, but when one becomes acquainted with the even more frightful danger, one hopes for death. **#[134]#** So when the danger is so great that death has become one's hope, then despair is the hopelessness of not even being able to die.

In this latter sense, then, the sickness unto death is despair, this agonizing contradiction, this sickness in the self: eternally to die, to die and yet not to die, to die the death.[3] For to die means that it is all over, but to die the death means that we experience what it is to die, and if this can be experienced for a single moment, it is thereby experienced forever. If a human being were to die of despair as one dies of an illness, then the eternal within him, the self, would have to be able to die in the same sense that the body dies of illness. But this is an impossibility; despair's dying constantly transforms itself into life. The despairing person cannot die. "No more than a dagger can kill thoughts"[4] can despair consume the eternal, the self, that is the basis of despair, whose worm does not die and whose fire is not quenched.[i] Yet despair is precisely a *self*-consumption, but an impotent self-consumption that is unable to do what it itself wants. What it wants is to consume itself, which it is unable to do, and this impotence is a new form of self-consumption in which, however, despair is again incapable of doing what it wants, of consuming itself—this is an intensification or is the law of the intensification. This is the incitement or the gangrene[5] in despair, the gnawing that constantly goes further and further in, deeper and deeper in impotent self-consumption. For the person in despair, so far from being a consolation is the fact that the despair does not consume him, that it is

precisely the opposite; this consolation is precisely the agony, is precisely what keeps the canker alive and keeps life in the canker, for it is precisely over this that he has—not despaired—but *is despairing*: that he cannot consume himself, cannot be rid of himself, cannot be annihilated. This is the intensification of the formula for despair, the rising fever in this sickness of the self.

A despairing person despairs over *something*. That is how it looks for a moment, but only for a moment; at that same moment, true despair makes its appearance, or the despair shows itself in its true form. When he despaired over *something*, he really despaired over *himself*, and now he wants to be rid of himself. Thus, when the power-crazed person whose motto is "Either Caesar or nothing at all"[6] does not become Caesar, he despairs over it. But it means something else: that precisely because he did not become Caesar, he now cannot endure being himself. Thus he does not really despair over the fact that he did not become **#[135]#** Caesar, but over himself for not having become Caesar. This self which, had it become Caesar, would have been his heart's desire—which in another sense, however, would have been equally despairing—to him, this self is now the most intolerable of all. In a deeper sense, what is intolerable for him is not the fact that he did not become Caesar; rather, what is intolerable to him is this self that did not become Caesar; or still more accurately, what is intolerable to him is that he cannot be rid of himself. If he had become Caesar, he would have been rid of himself in despair, but now he has failed to become Caesar and cannot be rid of himself in despair. Essentially, he is equally despairing, for he does not have his self, he is not himself. By having become Caesar, he would not, however, have become himself, but would have been rid of himself, and by not having become Caesar he despairs over not having been able to be rid of himself. Thus, it is a superficial remark (presumably by someone who has never seen a despairing person, much less seen himself) when someone says of a despairing person, as if it were his punishment: "He is consuming himself." For that is precisely what he, despairingly, cannot—and is precisely what he, in his agony, cannot—do: because with the despair, something that cannot burn or be burned up has been ignited in the self.

Therefore, to despair over something is still not genuine despair. It is the beginning stage, or as the physician would say of an illness, it has not yet declared itself. What is next is declared despair, to despair over oneself. A young girl despairs because of love, thus she despairs over the loss of the beloved—that he died or was unfaithful to her. This is not declared despair; no, she despairs over herself. This, her self, which, had she become "his" beloved, she would have been rid of, or lost, in the most blissful fashion—this self is now a plague to her if it is to be a self without "him." This self which—equally despairing, albeit in a different sense—would have become her treasure, has become a revolting emptiness to her now that "he" is dead, or it has become abhorrent to her because it reminds her that she has been deceived. Now, try it, say to such a girl, "You are consuming yourself," and you will hear her reply: "Oh, no, the agony is precisely the fact that I cannot do that."

To despair over oneself, in despair to will to be rid of oneself, is the formula for all despair, so the second form of despair, in despair to will to be oneself, can therefore be traced back to the first, in despair not to will to be **#[136]#** oneself, just as in the foregoing we resolved the form, in despair not to will to be[i] oneself, into despair to will to be oneself (see A).[7] A person in despair wills in despair to be himself. But if he wills in despair to be himself, then of course he does not will to be rid of himself. Yes, so it seems, but when one looks more closely, one will nonetheless see that the contradiction is the same. The self he wills in despair to be is a self he is not (for to will to be the self he truly is, is of course precisely the opposite of despair); he in fact wants to wrest his self away from the power that established it. But despite all his despair, this is something he is unable to do; despite all despair's efforts, that power is stronger, and it compels him to be the self he does not want to be. But, nonetheless, this is indeed how he wants to be rid of himself, rid of the self he is, in order to be the self he himself has come up with. To be a self in the way he wants (even though, in another sense, that would be just as despairing) would be his greatest delight, but to be compelled to be a self in a way he does not want to be, that is his agony: that he cannot be rid of himself.

Socrates proved the immortality of the soul from the fact that the sickness of the soul (sin) does not consume it as sickness of the body

consumes the body.[8] In this way, one can also prove the presence of the eternal in a human being from the fact that despair cannot consume his self, that this is precisely what constitutes the agony of contradiction in despair. Were there nothing eternal in a human being, he would be absolutely unable to despair, but were despair capable of consuming his self, despair would not have been present in any case.

This, then, is what despair is: a sickness in the self, the sickness unto death. The despairing person is mortally ill. In an entirely different sense than with any sickness, the sickness unto death has attacked the noblest parts, and yet he cannot die. Death is not the end of this sickness, but death is incessantly the end. It is impossible to be rescued from this sickness by death, for the sickness, and its agony—and the death—consist precisely in being unable to die.

This is the state of being in despair. However much it escapes the notice of the despairing person, however much the despairing person succeeds in having entirely lost his self (this must apply especially to the sort of despair that consists of ignorance of being in despair), and has lost it in such a manner that it is not noticed in the least way: eternity will nonetheless make it manifest that his condition was despair, and it will nail him fast to his self, so that the agony nonetheless continues to be that he cannot be rid of his self, **#[137]#** and it becomes manifest that he was deluded when he believed that he had succeeded in doing so. And eternity must do this, because to have a self, to be a self, is the greatest, the infinite, concession that has been granted a human being, but is also eternity's requirement of him.

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[i] See Mark 9:43–48, esp. v. 48.

[i] Variant: "not to will to be" is a handwritten correction in the galley proof of the first printing, which had "not to be."

#[138]#

B

THE UNIVERSALITY OF THIS SICKNESS (DESPAIR)

Just as a physician might well say that there perhaps is not one single human being alive who is entirely healthy, so might one, if one were truly knowledgeable concerning human beings, say that there is not a single human being alive who is not, after all, a bit in despair, in whom there does not, after all, dwell, deep down, an unrest, a discord, a disharmony, an anxiety for an unknown something or for something with which he does not even dare become acquainted, an anxiety concerning a possibility in existence or an anxiety concerning himself—so that, as a physician speaks of going about with a sickness in the body, this man in fact goes about with a sickness, goes about carrying a sickness of the spirit, which, owing to and accompanied by an anxiety that he finds inexplicable, permits him, once in a while, to take note, fleetingly, of its presence within him. And in any case, no human being who has ever lived, or who is living, outside of Christendom—and no one within Christendom, if he is not a true Christian—is without despair; and to the extent that he is not wholly a Christian, he is nonetheless to some extent in despair.

To many people, this observation will undoubtedly seem a paradox, an exaggeration, as well as a dark and depressing view of things. But it is none of these things. It is not dark; on the contrary, it seeks to shed light on what people ordinarily allow to remain in a certain obscurity. It is not depressing; on the contrary, it is uplifting, as it views every person under the aspect of the loftiest requirement to which he is subject, that of being spirit. Nor is it

a paradox; on the contrary it is a systematically developed foundational view, and as such neither is it an exaggeration. **#[139]#**

On the other hand, the generally held view of despair stops at appearances and is thus a superficial view—that is, it is no view at all. It assumes that of course every person must himself know best whether or not he is in despair. So the person who says that he is in despair is regarded as being in despair, but the person who thinks he is not is regarded as not being in despair. As a consequence of this, despair becomes a quite rare phenomenon instead of being quite common. It is not a rare thing for a person to be in despair; no, it is rare, very rare, that someone truly is not.

But the common view has a very poor understanding of despair. Among other things, it entirely overlooks (merely to mention that which, properly understood, includes thousands upon thousands and millions under the category of despair) that not to be in despair, not to be conscious that one is in despair, is precisely a form of despair. In a far deeper sense, in its understanding of despair, the common view is similar to what sometimes happens in connection with determining whether or not a person is sick—in a far deeper sense, for the common view understands far less of what spirit is (and without that, neither can one understand despair) than it understands of sickness and health. Generally, one assumes that a person is healthy if he does not himself say that he is sick, and even more so if he himself says he is well. The physician, on the other hand, takes a different view of sickness. Why so? Because the physician has a definite and developed notion of what it is to be well, and in accordance with that, he assesses a person's condition. The physician knows that just as there is sickness that is merely imaginary, so, too, is there health of this sort; therefore, in cases of the latter type, he first employs methods that will cause the sickness to manifest itself. Altogether, precisely because he is a physician (someone with insight), the physician does not have unconditional faith in a person's report of the state of his own health. If it were the case that what every person said concerning the state of his health—about whether he is healthy or sick, about where his problem lies, etc.—could be unconditionally relied upon, then being a physician would be a hallucination. For a physician has the task of not only prescribing medications, but first and foremost of recognizing the illness, and thus, in turn, first and foremost of ascertaining whether the supposedly sick person is actually sick, or whether the

supposedly well person is perhaps actually sick. This is also the situation of the physician of souls **#[140]#** in relation to despair. He knows what despair is, he recognizes it, and therefore is satisfied neither with a person's report that he is not in despair nor with his report that he is. It must in fact be noted that, in a certain sense, not even those who say they are in despair are always in despair. One can in fact affect despair, and one can err and confuse despair, which is a qualification of spirit, with all sorts of transitory dejection and unhappiness that pass away without coming to the point of despair. But the physician of souls indeed also regards these as forms of despair; he sees very well that they are affectation, but precisely this affectation is despair; he sees very well that this depression, etc., does not have much significance, but precisely this—that it does not have and does not acquire much significance—is despair.

Furthermore, the common view overlooks the fact that, in comparison with illness, despair is far more dialectical than what people otherwise call a sickness because it is a sickness of the spirit. And, properly understood, this dialectical quality in turn brings thousands under the category of despair. If, at a particular moment, a physician has indeed ascertained that such and such a person is well, and he then later falls ill, the physician can be correct in maintaining that at that time this person *was* well—now, on the other hand, he *is* ill. With despair, it is otherwise. As soon as despair manifests itself, it is manifest that the person was in despair. Thus at no moment can one decide anything about a person who has not been saved by having been in despair, for if something takes place that brings him to despair, it instantly becomes manifest that he has been in despair all his life. On the other hand, by no means can it be said that when a person has a fever, it now becomes manifest that he has had a fever all his life. But despair is a qualification of spirit, it is related to the eternal and therefore has something of the eternal in its dialectic.

Not only is despair far more dialectical than an illness, but all the symptoms related to despair are dialectical, and thus the superficial view is so easily deceived in determining whether or not despair is present. Not to be in despair can indeed signify precisely to be in despair, and it can signify being rescued from being in despair. Security and tranquility can signify being in despair—precisely this security, this tranquility can be the despair —and it can signify **#[141]#** having overcome despair and won peace. Not

being in despair is not like not being sick, for not being sick cannot, after all, be being sick, but not being in despair can mean precisely to be in despair. The situation with despair is not like that of sickness, in which feeling unwell constitutes the sickness. Not at all. Here again, feeling unwell is dialectical. Never to have sensed this feeling of being unwell is precisely to be in despair.

This means and is rooted in the fact that, regarded as spirit (and if one is to speak of despair, one must regard human beings under the aspect of spirit), a human being's condition is always critical. People speak of a crisis in relation to sickness, but not in relation to health. And why not? Because bodily health is an immediate qualification that becomes dialectical only in a state of sickness, when one can thus speak of a crisis. But spiritually, or when a human being is regarded as spirit, both health and sickness are critical; there is no such thing as immediate health of the spirit.

As soon as the human being ceases to be regarded under the aspect of spirit (and if he is not regarded in that way, neither can there be any talk of despair), but merely as a psychic-physical synthesis, health becomes an immediate qualification, and the dialectical qualification arises only when there is a sickness of the psyche or the body. But despair consists precisely in a human being's not being conscious of having been qualified as spirit. Even that which, humanly speaking, is most beautiful and most lovable of all, a feminine youthfulness that is sheer peace and harmony and joy: it is nonetheless despair. This is in fact happiness, but happiness is no qualification of spirit, and deep, deep within, farthest within, in the most concealed hiddenness within happiness—there, indeed, dwells also the anxiety that is despair; it wants so very much to be permitted to remain in there, for this is despair's dearest and most exquisite place to dwell: at the very heart of happiness. Despite illusory security and peace, all immediacy is anxiety and thus, quite consistently, is most anxious about nothing; one does not make immediacy as anxious with the most terrifying description of the most frightful something as with a subtle, almost casual, fragmentary aside about an indefinite something, tossed off with the most calculated reflection—indeed, one makes immediacy most anxious by craftily hinting to it that it of course knows what one is talking about. For immediacy certainly does not know it, **#[142]#** but never does reflection entrap with such certainty as when it fashions its snare out of nothing, and never is

reflection so thoroughly itself as when it is—nothing. An eminent degree of reflection—or, rather, great faith—is required in order to be able to endure reflection upon nothingness, that is, infinite reflection. Thus, even that which is the most beautiful and most lovable of all, a feminine youthfulness, is nonetheless despair, is happiness. Therefore, neither can one succeed in slipping through life on the basis of this immediacy. And if this happiness does succeed in slipping through, well then, it doesn't help very much, for it is despair. Despair, precisely because it is entirely dialectical, is indeed the sickness concerning which it is the greatest misfortune never to have had it—a true godsend to contract it, although it is the most dangerous sickness if one does not want to be cured of it. In other cases, it can be said only that it is good fortune to be cured of a sickness—the sickness itself is the misfortune.

The common view, which holds that despair is a rarity, is thus as far as possible from being correct; on the contrary, despair is quite common. The common view—that everyone who does not think or feel that he is in despair is not in despair, and that only the person who says he is in despair is in despair—is as far as possible from being correct. On the contrary, the person who without affectation says that he is in despair is a little, a dialectical step, closer to being cured than all those who are not regarded, and who do not regard themselves, as being in despair. But (and here the physician of souls will surely grant that I am right) this is precisely the usual situation: that most people live without being properly aware that they are destined as spirit—and this is the source of all the so-called security, satisfaction with life, etc., etc., which is precisely despair. On the other hand, those who say that they are in despair usually either are those who possess a nature that is so much deeper that they must necessarily become conscious of themselves as spirit, or are those who, owing to oppressive circumstances and dreadful decisions, have been helped to become conscious of themselves as spirit—it is either the one or the other, for a person who is truly not in despair is certainly extremely rare.

Ah, so much is said about human want and wretchedness—I seek to understand it and indeed have understood not a little of it firsthand; so much is said about wasting a life: but only that person's life was wasted who lived in such a fashion that, deceived by life's joys or by **#[143]#** its sorrows, he never became eternally, decisively conscious of himself as spirit, as self, or,

what amounts to the same thing, never became aware and never in the deepest sense gained the impression that there is a God, and that “he,” himself, his self, exists before this God—an infinite gain that is never attained except through despair. Alas, and this wretchedness—the fact that so many people live like this, defrauded of this most blessed of all thoughts—this wretchedness, that a person occupies himself (or, with the mass of humanity, that someone occupies them) with everything else, using them to furnish the energy for life’s drama, but never reminding them of this blessedness; that someone heaps them up in groups—and defrauds them instead of splitting them apart in order that each individual might gain what is highest, the only thing worth living for, and is enough to live in for an eternity: it seems to me that I could weep for an eternity over the fact that this wretchedness exists! Ah, and to my way of thinking, this is one additional expression of the terror of this most frightful of all sickness and wretchedness: its hiddenness, not only that the person who suffers from it may wish to conceal it and may succeed in doing so, that it can dwell in a person in such a way that no one, no one, discovers it—no, that it can be so concealed within a person that he himself is not aware of it! Ah, and then, when the hourglass has run out, the hourglass of temporality; when the hubbub of worldliness has fallen silent and the restless or futile busyness comes to an end; when everything around you is still, as it is in eternity—whether you are man or woman, rich or poor, dependent or independent, fortunate or unfortunate; whether, in majesty, you bore the glory of the crown, or, in lowly obscurity, bore only the toil and heat of the day;[i] whether your name shall be remembered as long as the world stands, and thus will have been remembered as long as it stood; or, without a name, you ran nameless in the innumerable mass; whether the splendor with which you were surrounded exceeded all human description, or whether you were subjected to the harshest and most ignominious human judgment: eternity asks of you, and of all these millions upon millions, only one thing, whether you have lived in despair or not, whether you were in despair in such a way that you did not know you were in despair, or in such a way that you bore this sickness concealed in your innermost recess as your gnawing secret, beneath your heart like the fruit of a sinful love, or in such a manner that you raged in despair, a terror to others. And if this is so, if you have lived in

despair, whatever you **#[144]#** perhaps won or lost, then for you all is lost, eternity does not acknowledge you, it never knew you[ii] —or even more frightfully, it knows you as you are known,[iii] it binds you fast to your self in despair!

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[i] See Matt. 20:1–16.
[ii] See Matt. 7:23; see also Matt. 25:12.
[iii] 1 Cor. 13:12.

#[145]#

C

THE FORMS OF THIS SICKNESS (DESPAIR)

The forms of despair can be determined by reflecting upon the elements of which the self, as a synthesis, consists. The self is composed of infinitude and finitude. But this synthesis is a relation, and a relation which, even though derived, relates to itself, which is freedom. The self is freedom. But freedom is the dialectical element in the categories of possibility and necessity.

Principally, however, despair must be viewed under the aspect of consciousness. Whether despair is conscious or not constitutes the qualitative distinction between one form of despair and another. To be sure, regarded in terms of its concept, all despair is conscious, but it does not follow from this that the person in whom it is present, the person who, from a conceptual point of view, may be said to be in despair, is himself conscious of this. Thus consciousness is what is decisive. In general, consciousness—i.e., self-consciousness—is the decisive factor in relation to the self. The more consciousness, the more self; the more consciousness, the more will; the more will, the more self. A person who possesses no will whatsoever is no self, but the more will he has, the more self-consciousness he has as well.

A

Despair considered without reflecting upon whether or not it is conscious, so that only the elements of the synthesis are reflected upon

#[146]#

a) DESPAIR CONSIDERED UNDER THE QUALIFICATION FINITUDE/INFINITUDE

The self is the conscious synthesis of infinitude and finitude that relates to itself, whose task is to become itself, which can only be done in the relation to God. But to become oneself is to become concrete. But to become concrete is neither to become finite nor to become infinite, for that which is to become concrete is indeed a synthesis. The development must therefore consist in coming infinitely away from oneself in the infinitization of the self and in coming infinitely back to oneself in the finitization. If, on the other hand, the self does not become itself, then it is in despair, whether it knows this or not. Yet at every moment it exists, the self is in the process of becoming, for the self κατα δυναμιν[i] has not actually come into existence, it is only that which shall come into existence. Insofar, then, as the self does not become itself, it is not its self; but not to be one's self is precisely despair.

α) Infinitude's despair is to lack finitude

That this is so is owing to the dialectical fact that the self is a synthesis, and thus each component is always its opposite. No form of despair can be defined straightforwardly (i.e., undialectically), but only by reflecting upon its opposite. The condition of the despairing person while he is in despair can be described straightforwardly, as is indeed done by the poet, who has him speak. But the despair can be defined only by its opposite, and if the words he speaks are to have poetic value, the play of colors in his expressions must contain a reflection of the dialectical opposite.[1] Thus, every human life which presumably has become, or which simply wants to

be, infinite—indeed, every instant in which a human life has become, or simply wants to be, infinite—is despair. For the self is the synthesis in which the finite is the limiting element and the infinite is the expansive element. Infinity's despair is therefore the fantastic, the boundless; for, indeed, the self is only healthy and free of despair when, precisely by having despaired, it is grounded transparently in God.

The fantastic is of course most closely related to the imagination, but the imagination, in turn, is related to feeling, knowledge, and will, so that a person **#[147]#** can have imaginary feeling, knowledge, and will. Altogether, the imagination is the medium of infinitization; the imagination is not a faculty like the other faculties—if it is to be spoken of in that manner, it is the faculty instar omnium.[i] In the final analysis, whatever feeling, knowledge, and will a person has depends upon what imagination he has, that is, upon how this person reflects himself, that is, upon imagination. Imagination is reflection that infinitizes, which is why the elder Fichte quite rightly assumed that even in relation to knowledge, imagination is the source of the categories.[2] The self is reflection, and the imagination is reflection, is the reproduction of the self, which is the possibility of the self. The imagination is the possibility of all reflection, and the intensity of this medium is the possibility of the intensity of the self.

On the whole, the fantastic is what leads a person out into the infinite in such a way that it only leads him away from himself and thereby prevents him from coming back to himself.

When the feelings become fantastic in this manner, the self merely becomes increasingly volatilized and finally becomes an abstract sensitivity which, in inhuman fashion, does not belong to any human being, but which inhumanly participates feelingly, so to speak, in the fate of one or another abstraction, e.g., humanity in abstracto.[i] Just as a person with rheumatism is not the master of his physical sensations (which are subject to the wind and the weather), so that he involuntarily notices changes in the atmosphere and so forth, so, too, with the person whose feelings have become fantastic: in a way, he has been infinitized, but not in such a way that he more and more becomes himself, for he more and more loses himself.

It is the same with knowledge when it becomes fantastic. The law regarding the development of the self with respect to knowledge—insofar

as it is to be true that the self becomes itself—is that the increasing degree of knowledge corresponds to the degree of self-knowledge, so that the more the self knows, the more it knows itself. If this does not happen, then, the more knowledge increases, the more it becomes a sort of inhuman knowledge in the production of which the person's self is squandered, more or less as human beings were squandered in the building of the pyramids or as human beings are squandered in that Russian horn music by being used for one note, neither more nor less.[3]

When the will becomes fantastic, then, in similar fashion, the self becomes more and more volatilized. Then the will no longer continues to become concrete to the same degree that it is abstract, **#[148]#** so that the more it is infinitized in purpose and determination, the more entirely present and simultaneous it becomes with itself in that small portion of the task that can be accomplished right now, so that in being infinitized, it in the strictest sense comes back to itself, so that in being *farthest away* from itself (when it is most infinitized in purpose and decision) it is at that same instant *nearest* itself in accomplishing that infinitely small portion of the work which can be accomplished even today, even at this hour, even at this instant.

And then, when feeling or knowledge or will have become fantastic—then, in the end, the entire self can become so, whether it thus assumes a more active form in which a person plunges into the fantastic, or a more passive form in which he is carried away: but in either case, he bears responsibility. The self, then, leads a fantastic existence in abstract infinitization or in abstract isolation, continually lacking its self, from which it moves only farther and farther away. Thus, for example, in the religious realm: the relation to God is infinitizing, but this infinitizing can so carry a person away in fantasy that it merely becomes a sort of intoxication. It can seem to a person as though it were impossible to endure existing before God because he cannot indeed come back to himself, become himself. To characterize him with the help of a few lines, a religious fantast of this sort would say: "That a sparrow can live[xli] —that is something I can grasp, it does not know that it exists before God—but to know that one exists before God, and then not, at that very instant, go mad or become nothing!"

But even though a person has become fantastic in this way and is thus in despair—even though that usually becomes obvious—he can nonetheless very well go on living, he can be, as it seems, a person engaged in temporal affairs, he can get married, beget children, be honored and respected—and perhaps people fail to notice that, in the deeper sense, he is lacking a self. In the world, no great fuss is made over this sort of thing, for in the world, a self is the thing that is least asked about and, most of all, is the thing that is dangerous to show that you have. In the world, the greatest danger, that of losing one's self,[i] can occur so quietly that it is as if it were nothing at all. No other loss can take place so quietly; every other loss—an arm, a leg, five rixdollars,[4] a spouse, etc.—is noticed, however.
#[149]#

β) Finitude's despair is to lack infinitude

That this is the case, as was shown under α, is inherent in the dialectical fact that the self is a synthesis, and thus either element is its opposite.

To lack infinitude is despairing limitedness, narrow-mindedness. But this, of course, refers solely to ethical narrow-mindedness and limitedness. In the world people really speak only of intellectual or aesthetic limitedness or of the matters of indifference that are always most spoken of in the world, for worldliness consists precisely in attributing infinite value to matters of indifference. The worldly view of things always fastens onto the difference between one person and another and of course has no understanding of the one thing needful[i] (for to possess that is spirituality) and thus no understanding of the limitedness and narrow-mindedness of having lost oneself, not by having become volatilized in the infinite, but by having become completely finitized, by having become a number, one more person, one more repetition of the perpetual *Einerlei*,[ii] instead of being a self.

Despairing narrow-mindedness consists in lacking primitivity or in having deprived oneself of one's primitivity, in having, spiritually understood, emasculated oneself. Every human being is in fact primally established as a self, destined to become oneself, and of course every self is, as such, angular, but this means merely that one is to be polished, not that one is to be ground down, not that one is entirely to give up being oneself

out of fear of people, or even that one should not, out of fear of people, dare to be oneself in one's essential accidentality (which is precisely what must not be ground down), in which one is in fact oneself for oneself. But while the one sort of despair goes astray in the infinite and loses itself, another sort of despair permits itself, as it were, to be fooled out of its self by "the others." By looking at the mass of people with which one is surrounded, by busying oneself with all sorts of worldly matters, by learning how things go in the world, such a person then forgets himself, forgets what his name (divinely understood) is, does not dare believe in himself, finds it too risky to be himself and much easier and safer to be like the others, to become an imitation, to become a number, a part of the crowd.

Now, the world takes just about no notice whatsoever of this sort of despair. Precisely by losing himself in this way, someone of this sort has # **[150]#** perfected himself so that he can properly become a part of the hustle and bustle of daily life, indeed, can be a success in the world. Here there are no delays, no difficulties concerning his self and its infinitization; he is as worn down and polished as a pebble on the beach, accepted as readily as a coin in circulation. So far is he from being regarded by anyone as being in despair that he is precisely what a person ought to be. Generally speaking, the world has of course no understanding of what is truly frightful. Naturally, the despair that not only does not inconvenience a person's life in any way, but that in fact makes life easy and pleasant for a person, is in no way regarded as despair. That this is the world's way of viewing the matter can be seen, for example, from virtually all proverbs, which are merely counsels of prudence. Thus people say that a person regrets ten times for having spoken for every one time that he regrets having remained silent—and why? Because having spoken is an external fact that can involve a person in unpleasantness, as it is something actual. But, to have remained silent! And yet, that is the most dangerous thing of all. For by remaining silent, a person is left entirely to himself; nothing actual comes to help him by chastising him, by bringing upon him the consequences of his having spoken. No, in that respect, remaining silent is something easy to do. But for that reason, the person who knows what is frightful fears most of all every error, every sin, that takes an inward course and leaves no outward trace. In the eyes of the world, it is dangerous to dare in this way—and why? Because one might lose. But not to venture—that is prudent. And yet,

by not venturing, one can so frightfully and easily lose something that would be difficult to lose no matter how much one would have lost by venturing, and in any case one could never have lost it in that way—as easily, as entirely, as if it were nothing at all: oneself. For if I have ventured wrongly, well then, life helps me with chastisement. But if I have not ventured at all, who will help me then? And, if in addition, by not having ventured at all in the highest sense (and to venture in the highest sense is precisely to become aware of oneself), I cravenly win every earthly advantage—and lose myself![i]

And this is precisely how it is with finitude's despair. Because a person despairs in this way, he can go on living very well (and actually, indeed, even better) in the temporal world, be to all appearances a human being, be praised by others, honored and respected, occupied with all the pursuits of the temporal world. Indeed, precisely what people call worldliness consists of nothing but of such people who, one can thus say, have made a pact with the world.[5] They employ their talents, accumulate money, carry out worldly enterprises, **#[151]#** calculate shrewdly, and so on and so forth, perhaps go down in history—but they are not themselves; spiritually understood, they possess no self, no self for the sake of which they could venture everything, no self before God—however selfish they are in other respects.

b) DESPAIR CONSIDERED UNDER THE QUALIFICATION POSSIBILITY/NECESSITY

Possibility and necessity are equally essential for becoming (and the self must indeed become itself freely). Just as infinitude and finitude (απειρον—περας)[ii] belong to the self, so also do possibility and necessity. A self that has no possibility is in despair, as is a self that has no necessity.

α) Possibility's despair is to lack necessity

That this is the case, as has been shown, is inherent in the dialectic.[6]

As finitude is the limiting factor in relation to infinitude, so, in relation to possibility, is necessity the constraint. Inasmuch as the self, as a synthesis of finitude and infinitude, has been established and exists κατα δυναμιν,[i]

then, in order to become itself, it reflects itself in the medium of the imagination, whereby infinite possibility reveals itself. κατα δυναμιν, the self is just as much possible as it is necessary, for it is of course itself, but it must become itself. Insofar as it is itself, it is the necessary, and insofar as it must become itself, it is a possibility.

Now, if possibility outruns necessity, then the self runs away from itself in possibility so that it has no necessity to which it must return: this, then, is possibility's despair. This self becomes an abstract possibility which leaps about in possibility until it is exhausted but does not move from the place where it is, nor does it come to any place, for the necessary is precisely the place; to become oneself is of course precisely a movement in place. To become is a movement from a place, but to become oneself is a movement in place.

To the self, it seems that possibility is greater and greater; more and more becomes possible for it, because nothing becomes actual. Finally, it is as if everything were possible, but this is precisely when the abyss has swallowed up the self. Every little possibility, **#[152]#** after all, would take some time in order to become actuality. But finally, the time that should be used for actuality gets shorter and shorter; everything becomes more and more momentary. Possibility becomes more and more intensive, but in the sense of possibility, not in the sense of actuality, for in the sense of actuality, what is intensive is that at least some of what is possible becomes actual. At the moment that something appears to be possible, a new possibility appears: finally, these phantasmagorias follow upon one another so rapidly that it seems as if everything were possible, and that is precisely the final moment when the individual himself has wholly become a mirage.

What the self now lacks is of course actuality; that is in fact what we generally say when we say that a person has become unreal. But upon closer inspection what he really lacks is necessity. What the philosophers explain—that necessity is the unity of possibility and actuality[7]—is not in fact true: no, actuality is the unity of possibility and necessity. Nor, when a self gets lost in possibility in this way, is it merely a lack of strength, at any rate not in the way that people generally understand it. What is lacking is really the strength to obey, to submit to what is necessary in one's self, to what might be called one's limit. Therefore, neither is the misfortune that a

self of this sort did not amount to something in the world—no, the misfortune is that he did not pay attention to himself, did not pay attention to the fact that the self he is is something quite definite and is thus the necessary. Instead, he lost himself when this self reflected itself fantastically in possibility. Even to be able to see one*self* in the mirror, it is necessary to know oneself, for if one does not know oneself, one does not see one*self*, but only a human being. But the mirror of possibility is no ordinary mirror; it must be used with extreme caution, for in the highest sense, this mirror is untruthful. That a self looks a certain way in the possibility of itself is only a half-truth, for in the possibility of itself, the self is still far from being—or is only halfway—itself. What matters, then, is how this self's necessity defines it more specifically. With possibility, the situation is similar to when one invites a child to one or another amusement: the child is immediately willing, but then it depends upon whether the parents will give their permission—and as with the parents, so it is with necessity. **#[153]#**

Yet everything is possible in possibility. Thus, one can get lost in possibility in every possible way, though essentially in two ways. The one form is in wishing, longing; the other is in melancholia-fantasy (hope/fear or anxiety). Fairy and folk tales often tell of a knight who suddenly catches sight of a rare bird which he continues to pursue, for at first it looks as if he is quite close to it, but then it flies off again, until night falls and he is separated from his companions, lost in the empty landscape in which he now finds himself. This is how it is with wish's possibility. Instead of taking possibility back into necessity, he runs after the possibility—and finally he is unable to find his way back to himself. — With melancholia, the opposite takes place in similar fashion: in his amorous melancholia, the individual pursues an anxiety-laden possibility which, in the end, leads him away from himself, so that he perishes in the anxiety or perishes in what he anxiously feared perishing in.

β) Necessity's despair is to lack possibility

If one were to compare running wild in possibility with a child's efforts at pronouncing vowels, then lacking possibility is like being dumb. Necessity, as it were, is solely composed of consonants, but in order to pronounce them, possibility is required. If the latter is lacking, if a human life is

brought to the point that it lacks possibility, it is in despair, and is in despair at every moment it lacks possibility.

Now, generally speaking, people think that there is a certain age that is especially full of hope, or they say that at a certain point in time, at a particular moment in his life, a person is, or was, so full of hope and possibility. All this, however, is merely human talk that does not get to the truth; all this hope and all this despair is not yet either true hope or true despair.

What is decisive is this: that for God everything is possible.[i] This is eternally true, and thus is true at every instant. People indeed say something like this all the time, and in everyday speech people put it this way, but the decisive point comes only when the person is brought to his uttermost extremity, when, humanly speaking, there is no possibility. Then the question is whether he will believe that for God everything is possible—that is, whether he will *have faith*. But this is the entire formula for losing one's understanding; to **#[154]#** have faith is precisely to lose one's understanding in order to gain God. Suppose the following. Imagine a person who—with a shudder summoned up by the whole of his terrified imagination—has envisioned one or another terrible thing that is absolutely unendurable. Then it happens to him, precisely this terrible thing happens to him. In human terms, his downfall is the most certain thing of all—and the despair in his soul battles despairingly to be permitted to despair, to gain, if you will, the peace in which to despair, the consent of his entire personality to despair and to be in despair; thus he would curse nothing and no one more than the person who attempted, and the attempt itself, to prevent him from despairing, as is excellently and incomparably expressed by the poet of poets:

> *Verwünscht sei Vetter, der mich abgelenkt Von dem bequemen Wege zur Verzweiflung* (*Richard II*, act 2, scene 3)[ii]

Thus, in human terms, salvation is the most impossible thing of all, but for God everything is possible! This is the battle of *faith*, which battles—madly, if you will—for possibility. For possibility is the only salvation. When someone faints, people shout: Water! Eau de cologne! Hoffmann's drops![8] But when someone is about to despair, the cry is: Get possibility,

get possibility, possibility is the only salvation! A possibility: then the person in despair breathes again, he revives; for in the absence of possibility, it is as though a person cannot breathe. Sometimes, the inventiveness of the human imagination suffices to procure possibility, but in the final analysis—that is, when it is a matter of having *faith*—the only thing that helps is this: that for God everything is possible.

Thus the struggle goes. Whether the person who struggles is to go down in defeat depends simply and solely upon whether he obtains possibility, i.e., whether he will have faith. And yet, he understands that, in human terms, his downfall is the most certain thing of all. This is the dialectical element in having faith. Ordinarily, a person knows nothing other than that he hopes that this or that thing, most likely, etc., will not happen to him. Then, if it happens to him, it is his downfall. The foolhardy person rushes into a danger that entails one or another possibility, and if it then happens to him, he despairs and meets his downfall. In human terms, the *person of faith* sees and understands his downfall (in what has befallen him or in what he has ventured), but he has faith. Therefore he does not succumb. He leaves the means of his deliverance entirely to God, but he has faith that for God everything is possible. It is impossible to *have faith* in his downfall. To understand that, from a human point of view, it is his downfall and nonetheless to have faith in possibility, is to have faith. Then **#[155]#** God indeed helps him, perhaps through permitting him to escape the terror, perhaps through the terror itself, that here, unexpectedly, miraculously, divinely—help appears. Miraculously—for it is, after all, a curious sort of narrow-mindedness to hold that receiving miraculous help is something that can only have happened to a person eighteen hundred years ago. Whether a person has been helped miraculously depends, essentially, upon the degree of passion with which his understanding has understood that the help was impossible, and, next, upon how honest he then is toward the power that nevertheless helped him. But ordinarily people do neither the one thing nor the other: they shriek that help is impossible without even having strained their understanding to find help, and afterward they ungratefully lie.

The person of faith possesses the eternally sure antidote to despair: possibility, because for God everything is possible at every instant. This is the health of faith that resolves contradictions. The contradiction here is that in human terms downfall is certain and that there is possibility nonetheless.

Generally speaking, health consists in the ability to resolve contradictions. Thus, in the bodily or physical sense, a draft is a contradiction, for a draft consists disparately or undialectically of cold and warmth, but a healthy body resolves this contradiction and does not notice the draft. So, too, with faith.

To lack possibility means either that everything has become necessary for a person or that everything has become trivial.

The determinist, the fatalist, is in despair, and, as a person in despair, he has lost his self, because for him everything has become necessity. His situation is like that of the king who starved to death because all food turned into gold.[9] Personhood is a synthesis of possibility and necessity. Its continued existence is thus like breathing (*re*spiration): there is a breathing in and a breathing out. The determinist's self cannot breathe, for it is impossible solely and only to breathe necessity, which simply suffocates a person's self. — The fatalist is in despair; he has lost God and thus his self, for the person who does not have a God does not have a self, either. But the fatalist does not have a God, or what is the same thing, his God is necessity. Inasmuch as everything is possible for God, then God is that everything is possible. Therefore, the fatalist's worship of God is at most an interjection, and in essence it is muteness, mute subjection—he cannot pray. To pray is also to breathe, and possibility is for the self what oxygen is for breathing. But possibility or necessity alone cannot suffice for the breathing of prayer any more than a person can breathe solely oxygen **#[156]#** or nitrogen.[10] In order to pray there must be a God, a self—and possibility, or a self and possibility in the eminent sense, for God is that everything is possible, or, that everything is possible is God. And only the person whose being has been so shaken that he became spirit by understanding that everything is possible—only that person has engaged with God. The fact that God's will is the possible makes it possible for me to pray—were it merely what is necessary, a human being would be essentially the same as an unspeaking animal.

With the bourgeois philistine mentality, with triviality, which also essentially lacks possibility, things are to some extent different. Bourgeois philistinism is spiritlessness; determinism and fatalism are spiritual despair, but spiritlessness is also despair. Bourgeois philistinism lacks every

characteristic of spirit and is taken up into the realm of probability, within which the possible has its little bit of room. It thus lacks the possibility of becoming aware of God. Devoid of imagination, as the bourgeois philistine always is, he lives in a sort of trivial compendium of experiences about how things turn out, what things are possible, what usually happens—regardless of whether the bourgeois philistine is a bartender or a cabinet minister. In this way, the bourgeois philistine has lost himself and God. For in order to become aware of one's self and of God, imagination must propel a person to something higher than the murky atmosphere of probability, it must wrest him free of that, and—in making possible what extends beyond the qvantum satis[1] of all experience—it must teach him to hope and to fear, or to fear and to hope. But the bourgeois philistine has no imagination, does not want to have it, abominates it. Thus, here there is no help to be had. And if existence occasionally helps by means of terrors that go beyond the trivial parrot-wisdom of experience, bourgeois philistinism despairs—that is, it becomes evident it was despair; it lacks the possibility of faith, of being able, through God, to save a self from certain downfall.

Fatalism and determinism, after all, have sufficient imagination to despair of possibility; they have possibility enough to discover the impossibility; bourgeois philistinism reassures itself with trivialities, equally in despair whether things go well or badly. Fatalism and determinism lack the possibility needed to relax and mitigate—to temper—necessity, that is, possibility as mitigation; bourgeois philistinism lacks possibility as an awakening from spiritlessness. For bourgeois philistinism believes it has **#[157]#** possibility at its disposal, believes that it has fooled that enormous elasticity into the trap or madhouse of probability, believes that it holds it captive. It leads possibility about, captive in the cage of probability, exhibits it, imagining itself to be the master, not noticing that precisely by doing so it has imprisoned itself as the slave of spiritlessness and is the most wretched of all. For the person who has become lost in possibility soars with the daring of despair; the person for whom everything became necessary overreaches himself in life, crushed in despair; but bourgeois philistinism, devoid of spirit, triumphs.

B

Despair considered under the qualification: consciousness

DESPAIR CONTINUALLY INCREASES IN its intensity as the degree of consciousness increases or in proportion to its increase: the more consciousness, the more intense the despair. This is seen everywhere, and most clearly in the maximum and minimum of despair. The devil's despair is the most intense despair, for the devil is pure spirit and in this respect is absolute consciousness and transparency. In the devil there is no obscurity that could serve as a mitigating excuse; his despair is therefore the most absolute defiance. This is despair at its maximum. At its minimum, despair is a state which (indeed, in human fashion, one could almost be tempted to say this), in a sort of innocence, does not even know that it is despair. Thus, despair is least when unconsciousness is at its maximum; it is indeed almost as though there were a dialectical question as to whether one can justify calling such a state despair.

a) THE DESPAIR THAT IS IGNORANT OF BEING DESPAIR, OR THE DESPAIRING IGNORANCE OF HAVING A SELF AND AN ETERNAL SELF

That this state nonetheless is despair and is rightly designated as such is an expression of what, in the good sense, is called the obstinacy of truth. Veritas est index sui et falsi.[i] But this obstinacy of truth is not truly respected, just as it is far from being the case that people generally **#[158]#** regard the relationship to truth, of relating oneself to the truth, as the highest good, and are very far from the Socratic principle of regarding being in error as the greatest misfortune;[11] most often, the sensuous element in them greatly outweighs their intellectuality. When a person is supposedly happy in this fashion, imagining himself to be happy, although regarded in the light of truth, is in fact unhappy, then most often it is far from being the

case that he wishes to be rescued from this error. On the contrary, he becomes embittered, he regards the person who does this as his worst enemy; he regards it as an assault, almost a murder, as when people say “it murders his happiness.” And what is the reason for this? It is because he is completely dominated by the sensuous and the sensuous-psychic; it is because he lives in the categories of the sensuous, the pleasant and the unpleasant, turning his back on spirit, truth, and the like; it is because he is too sensate to have the courage to dare be, and endure being, spirit. However vain and conceited people may be, most often they nonetheless have a very feeble conception of themselves, that is, they have no conception of being spirit, the absolute that a human being can be; but they are vain and conceited—comparing themselves to one another. Imagine a house consisting of a cellar, a ground floor, and a second floor,[12] occupied or arranged in such a manner that there was, or was intended to be, a difference in social class between the occupants of each floor—and if we were to compare being a human being with a house of this sort, then with most people, the sad and ludicrous result is that they prefer to live in the cellar of their own house. Every human being is a psychic-physical synthesis destined to be spirit: this is the building. But he prefers to live in the cellar, that is, in the categories of the sensuous. And not only does he prefer to live in the cellar, he loves it so much that he becomes infuriated if someone wants to suggest that he move into the *belle-étage*, which is vacant and available to him—for, after all, the house he lives in is his own.

No, being in error is what people, quite un-Socratically, fear least. One can see amazing examples that illustrate this on a grand scale. A thinker erects an enormous building, a system, a system that encompasses the whole of existence and the history of the world, etc.—and if one observes his personal life, one discovers, **#[159]#** to one’s astonishment, the frightful and ludicrous fact that he himself does not personally occupy this enormous palace with its lofty ceilings, but lives in an outbuilding beside it, or a doghouse, or at most in the porter’s lodge. If one were to take the liberty of pointing out this contradiction by saying a single word about it, he would be offended. For he has no fear of being in error, as long as he is able to complete the System[13]—assisted by being in error.

Thus, the fact that the person who is in despair does not himself know that his condition is despair makes no difference in the matter: he is in despair all the same. If despair consists of going astray, then the fact that a person is ignorant of the fact that he is in despair merely means that he is also under a delusion. The relation of ignorance to despair is similar to the relation of ignorance to anxiety (see *The Concept of Anxiety* by Vigilius Haufniensis[14]); the anxiety of spiritlessness is recognizable precisely by the spiritless sense of security. But nonetheless, the anxiety is present underneath—so, too, is despair also present underneath, and when the bewitchment of the senses comes to an end, when existence begins to waver, then it immediately becomes apparent that despair, too, was lying underneath.

Compared with the person who is conscious of being in despair, the despairing person who is ignorant that he is in despair is merely one negativity further away from truth and salvation. Despair itself is a negativity, ignorance of it is a new negativity. But in order to reach the truth, one must go through every negativity, for here, what the old folk tale says about breaking a certain enchantment is true: the entire piece must be played backward or the enchantment will not be broken.[15] But it is only in one sense—the purely dialectical sense—that the person who is ignorant of his despair is further from truth and salvation than the person who knows of his despair and yet nonetheless remains in despair, for in another sense, the ethical-dialectical sense, the person who is conscious of being in despair and remains in despair is further from salvation, because his despair is more intense. But so far is ignorance from dispelling the despair or transforming despair into non-despair that on the contrary, it can be the most dangerous form of despair. In ignorance, the person in despair is—albeit unto his own corruption—in a way protected against becoming aware: that is, he is quite securely in the grasp of despair.

A person is furthest from being conscious of himself as spirit when he is ignorant of being in despair. But precisely this—not being conscious of oneself as spirit **#[160]#**—is despair, it is spiritlessness, whether it be a state of utter extinction, a merely vegetative life, or an energized life of which the secret is nonetheless despair. In the latter case, the condition of the person in despair is like that of a person who suffers from consumption: he

feels at his best, regards himself as most healthy, perhaps is regarded by others as the picture of health—precisely when the illness is at its most dangerous point.

This form of despair (ignorance of it) is most common in the world; indeed, what people call the world, or more precisely, what Christianity calls the world—paganism and the natural human being in Christendom, paganism as it was historically and the paganism within Christendom—is precisely this type of despair: it is despair but does not know it. It is true that paganism and the natural human being make a distinction between being in despair and not being in despair, as if there were only some specific individuals who were in despair. But this distinction is just as deceptive as that which paganism and the natural human being make between love and self-love, as if all this love were not essentially self-love. But it is impossible for paganism and the natural human being to come any further than this deceptive distinction, because despair's specific characteristic is precisely this: to be ignorant of the fact that it is despair.

Now, from this it can easily be seen that the aesthetic concept of spiritlessness does not in any way provide a criterion for judging what is and is not despair, which, incidentally, is quite in order, for if, indeed, spirit cannot truly be defined aesthetically, how then should aesthetics be able to answer a question that simply does not exist for it! It would of course also be enormously foolish to deny that both pagan peoples en masse and individual pagans have accomplished amazing feats that have inspired and will continue to inspire poets, foolish to deny that the pagan world boasts examples of things which, from the point of view of aesthetics, cannot be sufficiently admired. It would also be foolish to deny that in paganism lives have been led, and can be led, by the natural human being, lives that are rich in the greatest aesthetic enjoyment and that in most tasteful fashion employ every possible advantage and indeed allow art and science to help enhance, beautify, and refine the enjoyment. No, the aesthetic definition of spiritlessness does not provide **#[161]#** the criterion for what is and is not despair—the definition that must be employed is the ethical-religious: spirit or, negatively, lack of spirit, spiritlessness. Every human existence that is not conscious of itself as spirit or personally conscious of itself, before God, as spirit; every human existence that thus is not grounded transparently in God in this way, but that reposes obscurely within, and is subsumed into,

some abstract universal (the state, the nation, and the like); or, in obscurity concerning itself, regards its abilities merely as active capacities without becoming in any deeper sense conscious of itself with respect to why[i] it has them; that regards itself, if it is to have any inner understanding of itself, as an inexplicable something: every such existence, whatever else it accomplishes—the most astounding things; whatever else it explains, if it were the whole of existence; however intensely it enjoys life aesthetically: every such existence is nonetheless despair. This was what the ancient Church Fathers meant when they said that the virtues of the pagans were glittering vices:[16] they meant that the pagan's innermost self was despair, that the pagan was not conscious of himself before God as spirit. This is also why (I cite this as an example, though it also has a deeper connection to this entire investigation) the pagans had such an irresponsible view of suicide—indeed, they praised it[17]—even though for the spirit it is the most decisive of sins to escape from existence like this: rebellion against God. The pagan lacked the spirit's definition of a self; therefore he judged suicide[i] as he did, and this was done by the very same pagan who passed such strict moral judgment against theft, fornication, and the like. He lacked the point of view for suicide, he lacked the God-relationship and the self; considered in purely pagan terms, suicide is a matter of indifference, it is something anyone can do if he pleases, because it is no one else's business. From a pagan standpoint, if there is to be an admonition against suicide, it must take the roundabout way of pointing out that a person would be defaulting on his obligations to other people. The point about suicide, that it is really a crime against God, entirely escapes the pagan. Thus one cannot say that suicide was despair, which would be a thoughtless hysteron-proteron;[ii] one may say that the fact that the pagan judged suicide as he did was despair.

Nevertheless, there is and remains a difference, and it is a qualitative difference, between paganism in the stricter sense and paganism within Christendom, the difference that has been pointed out by Vigilius Haufniensis in relation to anxiety:[18] **#[162]#** that paganism indeed lacks spirit, but nonetheless is oriented in the direction of spirit, whereas paganism within Christendom lacks spirit in the direction away from spirit,

or by having fallen away from it, and is therefore spiritlessness in the strictest sense.

b) THE DESPAIR THAT IS CONSCIOUS OF BEING DESPAIR, THAT THUS IS CONSCIOUS OF HAVING A SELF IN WHICH THERE IS AT ANY RATE SOMETHING ETERNAL, AND THEN EITHER IN DESPAIR WILLS NOT TO BE ITSELF OR IN DESPAIR WILLS TO BE ITSELF

Here, of course, a distinction must be made as to whether the person who is conscious of his despair has the true conception of what despair is. Thus, according to the conception of despair he has, a person can certainly be correct in saying that he is in despair; he can also be correct concerning the fact that he is in despair, yet this does not mean that he possesses the true conception of despair—it could be possible that someone, having considered that person's life in light of this conception, must say: "Fundamentally, you are far more despairing than you know, the despair is rooted far more deeply than that." Thus, with the pagan (to recall what has been said): When he regarded himself, in comparison to other pagans, as being in despair, he was certainly right about being in despair, but he was wrong in thinking that the others were not—that is, he did not have the true conception of despair.

Thus, on the one hand, the true conception of despair is required for there to be conscious despair. On the other hand, what is required is clarity regarding oneself—that is, insofar as clarity and despair can be thought at the same time. The extent to which complete clarity regarding oneself concerning the fact that one is in despair can be combined with being in despair—that is, whether this clarity of knowledge and self-knowledge must not simply wrest a person out of despair, make him so fearful for himself that he ceases to be in despair—we will not decide here; we will not even make an attempt to do so, because later we will find a place to investigate this entire matter. But here, without pursuing the thought to that dialectical extreme, we will merely point out that just as there can be very different degrees of consciousness concerning what despair is, so also is this the case with respect to degrees of consciousness concerning one's own

condition, that is, the fact that it is one of despair. **#[163]#** Actual life is too multifarious merely to set forth such abstract oppositions as those between a despair that is utterly ignorant of being despair and a despair that is completely conscious of being so. Most often, the situation of a person in despair is likely one of semi-obscurity (though, here again, with many nuances) concerning his own condition. To a certain degree, he himself does indeed know that he is in despair; he senses it within himself as a person senses within himself that he is living with a sickness in his body, but he does not truly want to admit what sickness it is. At one moment, it almost becomes clear to him that he is in despair, but then at the next moment it seems to him, after all, as though his indisposition has some other cause, as though it lay in something external, in something outside of him, and that if this were changed, he would not be in despair. Or perhaps, by means of diversions and other methods—for example, work and busyness as means of diversion—he seeks to preserve an obscurity concerning his situation, though once again in such a way that it does not become quite clear to him that he is doing what he does in order to bring about this obscurity. Or perhaps he is even aware that he is working like this in order to submerge his soul in obscurity, that he is doing it with a certain perspicacity and shrewd calculation, with psychological insight; but in the deeper sense he is not clearly aware of what he is doing, of how despairingly he is behaving, etc. For in fact there is, in all obscurity and ignorance, a dialectical interplay of knowledge and will, and one can err in understanding a person by accentuating only knowledge or by accentuating only the will.

But as has been noted earlier, the degree of consciousness intensifies despair. The truer a person's conception of despair—if he nonetheless remains in it, and the more clearly conscious he is of being in despair, if he nonetheless remains in despair—the more intense is the despair. If a person is conscious of the fact that committing suicide is despair and, having this true conception of what despair is, commits suicide, his despair is more intense than that of the person who commits suicide without having the true conception that suicide is despair; but conversely, the latter's untrue conception of suicide is less intense despair. On the other hand, the greater the clarity of consciousness of himself (self-consciousness) in a person who commits suicide, the more intense is his **#[164]#** despair compared with that

of a person whose soul, by comparison, is in a state of confusion and darkness.

In what follows, I will go through the two forms of conscious despair in a way that also points out an increase in the consciousness of what despair is and in the consciousness that one's condition is despair, or (what amounts to the same thing and is of decisive importance) an increase in consciousness of the self. But the opposite of being in despair is having faith, and thus precisely what was set forth earlier as the formula describing a state in which there is no despair whatsoever is also the formula for having faith: in relating to itself, and in willing to be itself, the self is grounded transparently in the power that established it. (See A, A.[lv])

α) In despair not to will to be oneself, weakness's despair

Calling this form of despair that of weakness already implies a reflection on the other form (β[ii]), in despair to will to be oneself. These oppositions are thus only relative. No despair is entirely devoid of defiance; defiance is also implicit in the expression itself: "not to will to be." On the other hand, even despair's most intense defiance is after all never without some weakness. The difference is thus only relative. The one form, so to speak, is feminine despair, the other is masculine despair.*
#[165]#

1) Despair over the earthly or over something earthly

This is pure immediacy or immediacy containing in itself a quantitative reflection. — Here there is no infinite consciousness of the self, of what despair is, or that the condition is one of despair; despair is merely something passive, a surrender to the pressure of external circumstances—it does not in any way emanate from within as an action. It is only through an —if you will—innocent misuse of language, a playing with words (as when a child plays soldier), that words such as "the self" and "despair" appear in the language of immediacy.

The *immediate person* (insofar as immediacy can exist entirely without reflection) is qualified solely psychically; his self, and he himself, is a Something within the bounds of the temporal and the worldly, **#[166]#** in

immediate continuity with the other (το ετερον[lx]), and has only an illusory appearance of having something eternal within itself. In this way, the self coheres immediately with the other—wishing, desiring, enjoying, etc., yet passively; even in desiring, this self is in the dative case, like the child's "me."[19] Its dialectic is the pleasant and the unpleasant; its concepts: good fortune, misfortune, fate.

Now something *happens*, something *befalls* (falls upon) this immediate self, something that causes it to despair; it cannot happen any other way, for the self has no reflection within itself. That which brings him to despair must come from without, and the despair is a suffering, something solely passive. That in which the immediate person has his life or, insofar as he has a little bit of reflection within himself, the portion of it to which he is especially attached, is taken from him "by a stroke of fate." In short, he becomes, as he says, **#[167]#** unhappy—that is, the immediacy within him has received such a blow that it cannot reproduce itself: he despairs. Or (and this is something that is not often seen in actuality, but dialectically is quite in order) this, the despair of immediacy, makes its entry owing to what the immediate person calls an altogether too great a stroke of good fortune; immediacy, as such, is indeed something terribly frail, and every quid nimis[ii] that requires reflection of it brings it to despair.

So he despairs—that is, with an odd backwardness and totally mystified with respect to himself, he calls it despair. But to despair is to lose the eternal—and of this loss he of course does not speak, he does not dream of it. In itself, to lose the earthly is not to despair, and yet this is what he talks about, and this is what he calls despairing. What he says is true in a certain sense, but it is not true in the way he understands it—he is turned around, and what he says must be understood backward: he stands and points at what is not despair, explaining that he is in despair, and in the meantime, it is quite true that despair is going on behind him and he does not realize it. It is as if someone stood with his back to the city hall and courthouse,[20] pointed straight ahead, and said: "There is the city hall and courthouse." That person is correct, it is right there—if he turns around. He is not in despair, it is not true—and yet he is right in saying it. But he says he is in despair, he regards himself as dead, as a shadow of himself. Yet he is not dead—there is still, if you will, life in the person. If suddenly everything—

everything external—were changed and his wish were fulfilled, then there would once again be life in him, then immediacy would arise once again, and he would begin life anew. But this is the only way that immediacy knows how to fight, the only thing it knows: to despair and to swoon—and yet it knows least of all what despair is. It despairs and swoons and then it lies completely still as though it were dead, like the trick known as "playing dead"; immediacy is like certain lower orders of animals that have no other weapons or means of defense than that of lying completely still and pretending to be dead.

Meanwhile, time passes. If external help arrives, life also returns to the despairing person; he begins where he left off: a self he was not and a self he did not become, but now he goes on living, **#[168]#** solely in the categories of immediacy. In actual life, if no external help arrives, most often something else happens. Then life returns to the person after all, but he says that "he will never be himself again." Now he acquires a bit of common sense about life, he learns to mimic other people, the way they get on with life—and now, that is how he lives as well. In Christendom he is also a Christian, goes to church every Sunday, listens to and understands the priest—indeed, they understand one another; he dies; for ten rixdollars, the priest ushers him into eternity[21]—but a self he was not, a self he did not become.

This form of despair is: in despair not to will to be oneself; or, still lower: in despair not to will to be a self; or, lowest of all: in despair to will to be someone other than oneself, to wish for a new self. Immediacy really has no self, it does not know itself, thus neither can it recognize itself and therefore usually ends up in fantasy. When immediacy despairs, it does not even have enough self to wish or to dream that it had in fact become what it did not become. The immediate person helps himself in another way: he wishes to be someone else. One can easily ascertain that this is the case by observing immediate people: in the moment of despair, they wish for nothing so much as that they had become, or that they could become, someone else. In any case, one can never keep from smiling at a despairing person such as this, who, humanly speaking, despite being in despair, is so very innocent. Frequently, a despairing person such as this is infinitely comical. Imagine a self (and, next to God, there is nothing so eternal as a

self), and then imagine that a self comes up with the notion concerning whether it might not be possible to become someone other—than itself. And yet, a despairing person such as this—whose sole wish is for this, the maddest of all mad transformations—he loves, he loves the delusion that the change could take place as easily as putting on a different outfit. For the immediate person does not know himself, he knows himself only, quite literally, from his outfit, he knows what it is to have a self (and here, again, is something infinitely comical) from external appearances. It is not easy to find an error more ludicrous than this, for a self is indeed infinitely different from external appearances. Then, when all external appearances have changed for the immediate person, and he has despaired—then he goes a step further, he thinks as follows, and it becomes his wish: "What if I became someone else, got myself a new self?" Yes, what if he **#[169]#** became someone else—I wonder whether he would recognize himself. They tell the story of a peasant who had come to the capital bare-legged and made enough money to buy himself a pair of shoes and stockings and still had enough left over to get drunk—they say that when, in his drunken state, he went to find his way home, he lay down in the middle of the road and fell asleep. Then a wagon came along, and the driver shouted to him, telling him to move or he would drive over his legs. The drunken peasant woke up, looked at his legs, and when he did not recognize them because of the shoes and stockings, he said: "Just go ahead, they're not my legs." That is how it is with the immediate person when he despairs: it is impossible to present him truthfully without some comedy—if I may say so, it takes some artistry merely to speak in the jargon about a self and about despair.

When immediacy is assumed to have some reflection within itself, the despair is somewhat modified; there is more consciousness of the self, and thus in turn, of what despair is and of the fact that a person's condition is one of despair. It makes some sense for such a person to speak of being in despair, but the despair is essentially that of weakness, a suffering; its form is: in despair not to will to be oneself.

The progress, in comparison with pure immediacy, is immediately visible here in the fact that the despair does not always come about as a consequence of a blow, of something happening, but can be brought about by the very reflection within oneself, so that the despair, if it is present, is not merely a passive suffering and a submission to external circumstances,

but is to some degree self-activity, action. Here there is indeed a certain degree of reflection, that is, a certain degree of consideration of oneself; this degree of reflection upon oneself marks the beginning of the act of separation through which the self becomes aware of itself as essentially different from the surrounding world and external circumstances and from their influence upon the self. But this is only to a certain degree. When, with a certain degree of reflection within itself, the self wills to proceed in taking charge of the self, it perhaps stumbles against one or another difficulty in the composition of the self, in the self's necessity. For just as no human body is perfect, neither is any self. Whatever this difficulty may be, he recoils from it. Or something befalls him that breaks more profoundly with the immediacy within him than he has done by means of his reflection. Or his **#[170]#** imagination discovers a possibility which, if it made its appearance, would thereby become the rupture with immediacy.

So he despairs. In contrast to the despair of self-assertion, his despair is that of weakness, a suffering of the self. But, assisted by the relative reflection he has within himself, he makes—and in this, once again, different from the purely immediate person—an attempt to protect his self. He understands that this letting go of the self is indeed an exchange in which some things are gained and others are lost; the battle does not put him in an apoplectic state as it does with the immediate person; helped by reflection, he understands that there is much he can lose without losing the self. He makes concessions—he is capable of doing so—and why? Because he has to some extent separated his self from external circumstances, because he has an obscure notion that there might even be something eternal in the self. But in doing this he is fighting in vain; the difficulty he has run up against requires a break with the whole of immediacy, and he has neither the self-reflection nor the ethical reflection required for that. He has no consciousness of a self that is won through infinite abstraction from everything external—this self, unlike the clothed self of immediacy, this naked, abstract self, which is the first form of the infinite self and is what propels forward the entire process whereby a self infinitely takes possession of its actual self, with its difficulties and its advantages.

So he despairs, and his despair is: not to will be himself. On the other hand, what definitely does not occur to him is the ridiculous notion of wanting to be someone else; he maintains the relation to his self: to that

extent, reflection has bound him to the self. His relation to the self, then, is similar to how the situation can be with a man in relation to the place where he lives (what is comical is that the relation of the self to itself is certainly not in any way nearly as detached as a man's relation to the place where he lives), which becomes repulsive to him because of the presence of smoke or for whatever reason; then he leaves it, but he does not move away, he does not sign a new lease, he still regards the old place as his dwelling; he assumes the problem will pass. This is also how it is with the person in despair. As long as this difficulty persists, he does not dare (as the expression so pointedly puts it) come to himself, does not want to be himself. But surely this will pass, perhaps things will change, the dark possibility will surely be forgotten. As long as this persists, he therefore, so to speak, pays a visit to himself only every so often to see whether the change has occurred, and as **#[171]#** soon as it occurs, he moves home again, "is himself once again," as he says, though this means only that he begins where he left off—thus, he was a self to a certain degree, and he became nothing more than that.

But if no change takes place, he helps himself in another way. He turns entirely away from the inward direction, the path along which he should have advanced in order truly to become a self. In the deeper sense, the entire question of the self turns into a sort of false door in the background of his soul, behind which there is nothing. He appropriates what he in his language calls his self, that is, whatever abilities, talents, etc., may have been granted him; all this he appropriates, though in the outward direction, toward, as it is called, life, the actual, the active life; he associates very cautiously with the little bit of reflection he has within himself—he fears that it might emerge again, that thing in the background. So he gradually succeeds in forgetting it; as the years pass, he finds it almost ludicrous, especially when he is in the good company of other capable and active men who bring with them sense and competence for real life. Charming! At this point, as they write in novels, he has already been happily married for a number of years, is an active and enterprising man, father, and citizen, perhaps even a great man; at home in his house, the servants call him "Himself"; in the city, he is among the distinguished citizens; his conduct shows that he is respected as a person or with the respect for someone who is, to judge from all appearances, a person. In Christendom he is a Christian

(in entirely the same sense as he would be a pagan in the pagan world and in Holland a Dutchman), one of the cultured Christians. He has often concerned himself with the question of immortality, and he has more than once asked the priest whether there is such an immortality, whether one would actually recognize oneself again—something in which he must of course take particular interest, for he hasn't any self.

It is impossible to depict a despair of this sort truthfully without a certain addition of satire. What is comical is that he wants to speak of having been in despair; what is frightful is that after having, as he would have it, overcome despair, his condition is precisely one of despair. What is infinitely comical is this: that the basis of this life-wisdom that is praised so highly in the world, that the basis of all this devil's abundance of good counsel and words of wisdom and waiting-and-seeing and putting-up-with-one's-fate and forgetting-about-it—that, ideally understood, the basis of all this is to be found in total ignorance **#[172]#** of where the danger really lies, of what the danger really is. But this ethical stupidity is, in turn, what is frightful.

Despair over the earthly or over something earthly is the most common form of despair, and especially under the second form: immediacy with a quantitative reflection. The more thoroughly reflected despair is, the more rarely it is seen or is found in the world. But this proves that most people have not indeed gone particularly deep in despairing, though by no means does it prove that they are not in despair. There are very few people who even approximate living in the category of spirit; indeed, there are not even very many who make an attempt at this life, and of those who do, most soon fall by the wayside. They have not learned to fear, not learned to "have to," regardless, infinitely regardless, of whatever else happens. Therefore they cannot endure what seems even to themselves to be a contradiction, which in the reflection of the surrounding world appears to be so much, much more glaring: that to the world, being concerned for one's soul and wanting to be spirit looks like a waste of time, indeed, like an indefensible waste of time that ought, if possible, to be punishable by law, and in any case should be punished with disdain and mockery as a species of treason against humanity, as a defiant madness that insanely fills up time with nothing. Then there comes a moment in their lives—alas, this is their best time—when they begin, after all, to direct their attention inward. Then they come

to what is more or less the first difficulty. There they turn aside—it seems to them as though the road led to a bleak desert—*und rings umher liegt schöne grüne Weide*.[i] Then they go off and soon forget these, their best days, forgetting them, alas, as if they were something childish. They are also Christians—reassured by the priests regarding the matter of their salvation. As has been noted, this is the most widespread form of despair; it is so widespread that one could explain, on that basis alone, the view, widely held in everyday discourse, that despair is supposedly a property of youth, present only in early years, but not found in the adult man who has reached the age of discretion and maturity. This is a desperate misapprehension, or more correctly, a desperate mistake, which overlooks—yes, and what is even worse, it overlooks the fact that what it overlooks is almost the best thing that can be said about a person, because what most often happens is something much worse—it overlooks the fact that most people, throughout their entire lives, fundamentally never come any further than **#[173]#** being what they were in their childhood and youth: immediacy with the addition of a dash of reflection. No, despair is truly not something that appears only among the young, something one simply outgrows—"as one outgrows an illusion," which of course is not something people do, even if they are foolish enough to think so. On the contrary, one quite often encounters men, women, and elderly people who have childish illusions as much as those of any youth. But people overlook the fact that illusion has essentially two forms: that of hope, and that of recollection. The youth has the illusion of hope. The older person has that of recollection, but precisely because he is in an illusion, he also has the entirely one-sided notion that the only illusion is that of hope. And it is clear that the older person is not plagued by the illusion of hope, but on the contrary, he is plagued, among other things, by the queer illusion of looking down upon the illusions of youth from a supposedly higher standpoint that is without illusions. The youth is in an illusion: he hopes for the extraordinary, both from life and from himself. On the other hand, with the elderly person one often finds illusions in the way he remembers his youth. In her memories of herself as a young girl, of how happy she was at the time, how beautiful, etc., an older woman, who now has supposedly given up all illusions, is found to entertain fantastic illusions as much as any young girl does. This fuimus,[i] which is so often heard from

older people, is fully as great an illusion as the youth's illusion concerning the future: both of them lie or poetize.

But far more desperate is the erroneous view that despair belongs only to youth. Altogether, the belief that things go quite easily in connection with faith and wisdom, that they actually show up more or less as a matter of course as one grows older—like teeth, a beard, and so forth—is enormously foolish and is a misunderstanding of what spirit is, as well as a failure to appreciate the fact that a human being is spirit and not merely an animal creature. No, whatever a human being comes to as a matter of course, and whatever comes as a matter of course, faith and wisdom definitely do not. But the fact is this: as the years pass, a human being, spiritually understood, does not come to anything as a matter of course—that category is precisely the spirit's most diametrical opposite; rather, as the years pass, it is very easy to leave something behind. And as the years pass, a person may perhaps leave behind the little bit of passion, feeling, and imagination, the fragment of inwardness, he possessed and enter, as a matter of course (for such things do come as a matter of course) into the trivial definition of the sensible life. This . . . improved situation, which indeed has come about as # **[174]#** the years passed, he now, in his despair, regards as something good; he easily assures himself (and in a certain satirical sense, nothing is more certain) that now it could never occur to him to despair—no, he has protected himself, he is in despair, spiritlessly[i] in despair. Why, I wonder, did Socrates love youth, if not because he knew humanity!

And if a person does not sink into the most trivial sort of despair as the years pass, it does not by any means follow from this that despair is the sole province of youth. If a person actually develops over the years, if he matures in his essential consciousness regarding the self, then he may perhaps despair in a higher form. And as the years pass, if he does not develop essentially and does not simply sink into triviality—that is, if he remains more or less as he was as a young man, a youth, in spite of being a man, a father, and a graybeard—then, while preserving some of the good qualities of youth, he will of course also be vulnerable to despairing, as a youth does, over the earthly or over something earthly.

There can indeed be a difference between the despair of an older person such as this and that of a youth, but only in purely accidental respects, not

essentially. The youth despairs over what is to come, as a present in futuro[ii] there is something in what is to come that he does not want to make his own, he does not want to be himself with it. The elderly person despairs of what is past as a present in præterito[iii] that refuses to recede further and further into the past—for he is not, after all, so much in despair that he has succeeded in forgetting it entirely. This past is perhaps even something that repentance should really take hold of. But if repentance is to emerge, he must first despair completely, despair utterly, so that the life of the spirit might break through from the ground up. But in despair as he is, he does not dare let it come to such a decision. So he remains standing there, time passes—unless, in even greater despair and assisted by forgetfulness, he succeeds in making things whole, so that instead of becoming a penitent, he becomes the recipient of his own stolen goods.[22] Essentially, however, the despair of such a youth and of such an elderly person is the same; no metamorphosis arrives in which consciousness of the eternal in the self breaks through so that there might be a start to the battle that either intensifies the despair into a still higher form or leads to faith.

But then, is there no essential difference between the two expressions which up to now have been used identically: to despair over the earthly (the category of totality), **#[175]#** and to despair over something earthly (the particular)? Indeed there is. When, in imagination, the self despairs with infinite passion over something earthly, the infinite passion makes this particular, this something, into the earthly in toto;[i] this means that the category of totality is inherent in and belongs to the despairing person. The earthly and the temporal, as such, are precisely what fall out from one another into something, into the particular. It is actually impossible to lose or be deprived of everything earthly, for the concept of totality is a category of thought. Thus it is the self that first magnifies the actual loss infinitely, and then comes to despair over the earthly *in toto*. But as soon as this distinction (between despairing over the earthly and despairing over something earthly) is to be essentially set forth, there is also an essential advance in consciousness of the self. This formula, to despair over the earthly, is thus a dialectical initial expression of the next form of despair.

2) Despair of the eternal or over oneself

Despair over the earthly or over something earthly is indeed really also despair of the eternal and over oneself, insofar as it is despair, for this is indeed the formula for all despair.* But the despairing person, as he was presented in the preceding pages, was not aware **#[176]#** of what was, so to speak, taking place behind him; he thinks he is despairing over something earthly and constantly talks about what it is he is despairing over. And yet he is despairing of the eternal, for the fact that he attributes so much value to the earthly—or to be more specific, the fact that he attributes so much value to something earthly, or that he first makes something earthly into everything earthly and then attributes so much value to the earthly—is of course precisely to despair of the eternal.

Now this despair is a significant step forward. If the preceding despair was *in weakness*, this form is *despair over one's weakness*, while still remaining within the category: weakness's despair—as distinct from β[i] (defiance). There is thus only a relative difference, which is that the preceding form has weakness's consciousness as its final consciousness, whereas in this case consciousness does not stop at that point, but intensifies itself into a new consciousness, consciousness of its weakness. The despairing person himself understands that it is weakness to be so affected by the earthly, that it is weakness to despair. But then, instead of truly turning away from despair and toward faith, humbling himself before God under his weakness, he immerses himself in despair and despairs over his weakness. Thereby, his entire point of view is turned around: he now becomes more acutely conscious of his despair, conscious that he despairs of the eternal; he despairs over himself that he could be so weak as to attribute such great significance to the earthly—which for him now becomes the despairing expression of the fact that he has lost the eternal and himself.

Here is the ascent. First of all, in the consciousness of the self, for it is indeed impossible to despair of the eternal without having a conception of the self, that there is something eternal in it or that it has had something eternal in it. And if one is to despair over oneself, one must oneself also be conscious of having a self; yet this is what he despairs over, not over the earthly or something earthly, but over himself. Moreover, here there is greater consciousness of what despair is, for despair consists precisely in

having lost the eternal and oneself. There is, of course, also greater consciousness that one's condition is one of despair. Furthermore, here despair is not only a passive suffering, but an action. For when the earthly is taken away from the self and he despairs, it is as if the despair came from without, even though it always comes from the self; but when the self despairs over this, over its own despair, then this new despair comes from the self, indirectly-directly from the self, as a counterpressure (reaction), and, in this, it differs from defiance, which comes **#[177]#** directly from the self. Finally, here there is in fact yet another step forward, albeit in another sense—for precisely because this despair is more intensive, it is in a certain sense closer to salvation. A despair such as this is difficult to forget—it is too deep; but at every instant the despair is held open, there is also a possibility of salvation.

But nonetheless, this despair is to be classified under the form: in despair not to will to be oneself. As when a father disinherits his son, the self does not want to acknowledge itself after having been so weak. In its despair, it cannot forget this weakness; in a way, it hates itself; it will not humble itself in faith under its weakness in order to in that way regain itself—no, in despair, it, so to speak, does not want to hear anything about itself, does not want to have anything to do with itself, so to speak. But neither can there be any question of being helped through forgetting, nor, with the assistance of forgetting, of slipping in under the category of spiritlessness and thus become a man and a Christian like other men and Christians—no, the self is too much self for that. As indeed it often went with the father who disinherited his son, the outward fact was of but scant help to him—by having done it, he did not get free of his son, at least not in his thoughts. As often happens with the lover's curse upon the hated one (that is, upon the beloved): it does not help much, it almost imprisons one even more—that is how things go with the despairing self regarding itself.

This despair is a qualitative level deeper than the one described previously, and is a despair of the sort that is found less often in the world. That false door spoken of earlier, behind which there was nothing, is here an actual door—but, to be sure, a very carefully closed door—behind which sits the self, as it were, looking after itself, busy with—or passing the time with—not willing to be itself, and yet it is self enough to love itself. This is what is called *self-enclosure*. And from here on, we will be dealing with

self-enclosure, which is diametrically opposed to immediacy, and—in a number of areas, including the realm of thought—has enormous contempt for it.

But then, does not such a self exist in actuality—has he fled beyond the actual, into the desert, the monastery, the madhouse? Is he not an actual human being, dressed like other people or, like others, clad in the customary outer garments? Oh, of course, why not? But he shares this self with no one, not a soul. He feels no need to do so, or he has learned to repress such a need—just listen when he himself speaks of it: “Indeed, **#[178]#** only absolutely immediate people—who from the point of view of spirit are situated at about the same point as the child in the earliest stage of early childhood, when with utterly lovable unconstraint, it lets everything come out—it is only absolutely immediate people who are utterly incapable of holding back. This is the sort of immediacy which with great pretensions often calls itself ‘Truth, being true, a true person, and entirely as one is’—which indeed is just as true as it is untrue that an older person gives way the instant he feels a bodily urge. Every self that is even the least bit reflective has, after all, at least some notion of restraining the self.” And our despairing person is thus sufficiently self-enclosed to be able to keep everyone whom it does not concern—that is, everyone—away from this matter of the self, while outwardly he is entirely “a real person.” He is an academically educated man, a husband, a father, even an unusually capable public official, a respectable father, pleasant to be with, very sweet to his wife, carefulness itself with his children. And a Christian? —well, yes, he is that, too, in a way—however, he prefers to avoid talking about it, even if he is happy to see, with a certain wistful joy, that his wife occupies herself edifyingly with godly things. He goes to church very rarely because it seems to him that most of the priests don’t really know what they are talking about. He makes an exception with one particular priest who, he grants, does know what he is talking about, but there is another reason he does not want to listen to him: he fears that it might lead him too far. On the other hand, he not infrequently feels a need for solitude—for him it is a vital necessity, at some times like breathing, at others like sleep. The fact that he, more than most people, has this vital necessity is thus another sign that he possesses a more profound nature. Generally speaking, the need for solitude indicates that there is at any rate some spirit in a person and is the

measure for whatever there is of spirit. “The utterly frivolous non-persons and fellowmen” feel so little need for solitude that, like lovebirds, they die immediately if they must be alone for an instant; as the little child is lulled to sleep, these people need the tranquilizing lull of sociability in order to be able to eat, drink, sleep, pray, fall in love, etc. But in antiquity as well as in the Middle Ages, people were aware of this need for solitude and had respect for what it signifies. In the perpetual sociability[24] of our times, people shrink back from **#[179]#** solitude to such an extent that people (what a splendid epigram!) have no idea of what to use it for other than as a punishment for criminals.[25] It is true, in fact, that in our times it is indeed a crime to possess spirit, so it is of course fitting that such people, the lovers of solitude, should be classed with criminals.

The self-enclosed despairing person thus lives on, horis successivis,[i] in hours which, even if they are not lived for eternity, nonetheless have something to do with the eternal, concerned with his self’s relation to itself. But he does not really get any further. Then, when this has been done, when the need for solitude has been satisfied, then, as it were, he goes out—even when he goes in or occupies himself with his wife and his children. Aside from his natural good nature and his sense of obligation, what makes him so gentle as a husband, so solicitous as a father, is the admission he has made to himself, deepest within himself, concerning his weakness.

Were it possible for someone to become his confidant in his self-enclosure, and were someone then to say to him, “Of course, it is pride, you really are proud of yourself,” he certainly would scarcely confess that to anyone else. When he was alone with himself, he would probably confess that there was something to it, but the vehemence with which his self had understood his weakness would soon cause him to imagine once again that it was impossible that it could be pride, for of course he was despairing over his weakness—as if it were not pride that placed such enormous emphasis on the weakness, as if it were not because he wanted to be proud of himself for being unable to endure this consciousness of weakness. — If one were to say to him: “This is a curious complication, a curious sort of knot, for the entire misfortune really lies in the way in which thought contorts itself; otherwise it is in fact even normal—it is precisely the path you must take, you must go to the self through the despair of the self. Your concern with

weakness is quite proper, but that is not what you are to despair over; the self must be broken in order to become itself, just stop despairing over it”—if someone were to speak to him in this manner, in a dispassionate moment he would understand it, but soon the passion would again see things erroneously, and then he would again take the wrong turn, into despair.

As has been stated, despair of this sort is rather rare in the world. Then, if he does not remain standing at this spot, merely marking time—and if, on the other hand, no upheaval takes place within the despairing person, so that he gets on the right path toward faith—then **#[180]#** a despair of this sort will either intensify itself into a higher form of despair and continue to be self-enclosure, or it will break through to the outside and destroy the outward cloak in which a despairing person of this sort has been living, as in an incognito. In the latter case, a despairing person of this sort will then hurl himself into life, perhaps into the diversion of great ventures; he will become a restless spirit whose existence leaves much in its wake, a restless spirit who wants to forget—and when the clamor within becomes too great, more powerful means must be employed, albeit of a different sort than those Richard III uses in order not to hear his mother’s curses.[26] Or he will seek forgetfulness in sensuality, perhaps in debauchery; in despair, he wants to return to immediacy, though always with the consciousness of the self he does not want to be. In the former case, when the despair is intensified, it becomes defiance, and now it becomes apparent how much untruth there was in that matter of weakness; it becomes apparent how dialectically correct it is that the first expression for defiance is precisely despair over his weakness.

But in conclusion, let us once again take a brief look at the self-enclosed person, who is marking time in his self-enclosure. If this self-enclosure is maintained absolutely, omnibus numeris absoluta,[i] then suicide will be the danger closest to him. Most people are such that they naturally have no idea of what such a self-enclosed person is capable of bearing; if they found out, they would be astonished. But, again, for the absolutely self-enclosed person the greatest danger is suicide. On the other hand, if he speaks with someone, if he opens himself to one single person, then in all likelihood his state of tension will be sufficiently reduced or toned down, so that suicide will not result from the self-enclosure. A self-enclosure such as this, in

which one confidant is included, is an entire level less severe than absolute self-enclosure. He will thus probably avoid suicide. Though it can happen that he despairs precisely over the fact that he has opened himself to another, so that it seems to him that it would have been far preferable if, instead of having had a confidant, he had held out in silence. There are examples of this, where a self-enclosed person has been brought to despair precisely by having had a confidant. Then suicide can be the consequence after all. In a poetic treatment, the turning point of the plot (assuming poetice[i] that the main character is a king or an emperor) could also be fashioned so that he has the confidant put to death. One could imagine a demonic tyrant of this sort who felt the need to speak with **#[181]#** someone about his torment and who then consumed a great number of people, one after the other, for it was certain death to be his confidant: as soon as the tyrant had told him what he had to tell, he was put to death. — It would be a task for a poet to present a demonic person's agonizing self-contradiction—to be unable to do without a confidant and unable to have a confidant—and resolve it in this manner.

β) The despair, in despair to will to be oneself, defiance

As it was shown[27] that one could call α feminine despair, so could one call this despair masculine. Thus, in comparison to the foregoing section, this is despair viewed under the category of spirit. But viewed in this way, masculinity essentially belongs under the category of spirit, while femininity is a lower synthesis.

The despair described under α 2[ii] was over one's weakness: the despairing person does not will to be himself. But if he goes a single dialectical step further, the person who despairs in this manner then comes to consciousness about why he does not will to be himself—then things are reversed,[28] then defiance is there, for then it is precisely because he wills in despair to be himself.

First comes despair over the earthly or over something earthly; next comes despair of the eternal, over oneself. Then comes the defiance that is really despair with the help of the eternal, the despairing misuse of the eternal that is in the self in order in despair to will to be oneself. But precisely because it is despair through the help of the eternal, it is in a

certain sense very close to the truth; and precisely because the truth is very close at hand, it is infinitely far away. The despair that is the passageway to faith is also through the aid of the eternal; through the aid of the eternal, the self has the courage to lose itself in order to gain itself; here, on the other hand, it does not want to begin by losing itself, but wills to be itself.

In this form of despair there is now an increase in consciousness of the self, that is, a greater consciousness of what despair is and of the fact that one's condition is one of despair; here the despair is conscious of itself as an act: it does not come from without as a passive suffering under the pressure of external circumstances, it comes directly from the self. And thus, compared to despair over one's weakness, defiance is indeed a new - qualification. **#[182]#**

To be able in despair to will to be oneself, there must be consciousness of an infinite self. This infinite self, however, is really only the most abstract form, the most abstract possibility of the self. And it is this self that he despairingly wills to be, wresting the self loose from every relation to the power that established it, or wresting it loose from the notion that such a power exists. With the help of this infinite form, the self wills in despair to rule over itself or to create itself, making his self into the self he wills to be, to determine what he will and will not have in his concrete self. His concrete self, or his concretion, of course has necessity and limitations, is this quite definite self, with these abilities, aptitudes, etc., in this set of concrete relations, etc. But with the help of the infinite form, the negative self, he wants first to take upon himself the task of reshaping this whole in order then to obtain from it a self such as he wants, produced with the assistance of the infinite form of the negative self—and in this way he wills to be himself. This means that he wants to begin a bit earlier than other people, not at and with the beginning, but "in the beginning";[i] he does not want to put on his own self, does not want to see his task in the self that has been given to him: he himself wants to construct his self, assisted by being the infinite form.

If one wanted to have a common name for this despair, one could call it Stoicism, though not as if one were thinking only of that sect. And in order to illuminate this type of despair more fully, one does best to differentiate between an active self and a passive self, and to show how the self relates to

itself when it acts, and how the self, when it is acted upon, relates to itself in being acted upon, and that the formula always remains: in despair to will to be oneself.

If the despairing self is an *active* self, it really relates to itself only in experimenting fashion, no matter what it undertakes, however great, however amazing, however doggedly. It acknowledges no power higher than itself; therefore, in the final analysis, it lacks seriousness and can conjure up an appearance of seriousness only when it itself devotes its greatest attention to its experiments. Now, this is a sham seriousness: as with Prometheus's theft of fire from the gods, this is stealing from God the thought (which *is* seriousness) that God takes notice of a person, instead of which the despairing self is satisfied with taking notice of itself; this is supposed to endow his undertakings with infinite interest and significance, while in fact it is precisely what makes them into experiments. For even if this self **#[183]#** does not go so far in despair that it becomes an experimentally constructed god, no derived self can, by taking notice of itself, in fact endow itself with more than it itself is: it still remains itself from beginning to end—in reduplicating itself, it becomes neither more nor less than the self. Insofar as the self, in its desperate effort at willing to be itself, moves in precisely the opposite direction, it really becomes no self. In the entire dialectic within which it acts there is nothing firm; at no moment does what the self is stand firm—that is, eternally firm. The negative form of the self exercises a power that is as much loosening as it is binding;[i] at any moment it can quite arbitrarily begin all over again, and however long a thought is pursued, the entire affair is within a hypothesis. So far is the self from succeeding in becoming more and more itself, that it merely becomes more and more apparent that it is a hypothetical self. The self is its own master—absolutely its own master, as is said—and precisely this is the despair, but is also what it regards as its desire, its delight. Nonetheless, upon closer inspection one easily ascertains that this absolute ruler is a king without a country, he actually rules over nothing; his situation, his kingdom, is subject to the dialectic that rebellion is always legitimate. In the final analysis, it depends arbitrarily upon the self itself.

Thus, the despairing self continually builds nothing but castles in the air and is continually merely fencing in the air.[ii] All these experimenting

virtues make a splendid show; for a moment, they enchant like oriental poetry; such self-control, such imperturbability, such ataraxia, etc., almost border on fable. Yes, they truly do, and the basis of it all is in fact nothing. In its despair, the self wants to enjoy the entire satisfaction of making itself into itself, of developing itself, of being itself—it wants to be honored for this poetic, masterly design, for how it has understood itself. And yet, in the final analysis, what it understands itself to be is an enigma; at the very instant at which it seems to be closest to having completed the building, it can arbitrarily dissolve it all into nothing.

If the despairing self is *acted upon*, the despair is nonetheless: in despair to will to be oneself. Perhaps, when it is tentatively orienting itself in its concrete self, an experimenting self such as this, which in despair wills to be itself, runs into one or another difficulty, something that the **#[184]#** Christian would call a cross, a fundamental impairment, whatever it might be. The negative self, the infinite form of the self, would perhaps simply disregard this utterly, pretend that it did not exist—at any rate, have nothing to do with it. But this does not succeed; its virtuosity in experimentation does not reach that far; not even its virtuosity in abstraction reaches that far: in Promethean fashion,[29] the infinite, negative self feels itself to be nailed fast to this servitude. This, then, is a self that is acted upon. How, in this case, does this despair—in despair to will to be oneself—manifest itself?

Now, the preceding passage presented the form of despair that despairs over the earthly or over something earthly, understood such that this fundamentally is—and reveals itself to be—despair of the eternal, i.e., to be unwilling to let oneself be consoled and be healed by the eternal, to value the earthly so highly that the eternal cannot be of any consolation. But it is also a form of despair to be unwilling to hope in the possibility that an earthly suffering, a temporal cross, can be taken away. Now, this is something this despairing person, who in despair wills to be himself, is unwilling to do. If he has convinced himself that this thorn in the flesh[i] (whether it is actually present or his passion makes it seem to him that it is) gnaws so deeply that he is unable to abstract from it,* then he wills, as it were, to make it a part of himself for eternity. So he is offended by it, or rather, he lets it serve as the occasion to be offended at the whole of existence: then he wills to be himself in spite of it, not be himself in spite of

it **#[185]#** without it (that, of course, would be to abstract from it, and that he cannot do—or it would be movement in the direction of resignation): no, in spite of, or in defiance of, all of existence, he wills to be himself along with it, he wills to take it along with himself, almost defying his agony. For to hope for the possibility of help, especially by virtue of the absurd, that for God everything is possible:[ii] no, that he will not do. And seek help from someone else? No, he would not do that for all the world—rather than seek help, he would prefer to be himself with all the torments of hell (if that was how it had to be).

And truly, what they say—"that it is obvious that a person who suffers would willingly accept help if only someone could help him"—is far from being true, even if the alternative examples are not always as despairing as in this case. This is the how things stand: A person who suffers generally has one or more ways in which he could wish to be helped. If he can be helped in that fashion, yes, he will gladly accept help. But when, in the deepest sense, one is to be helped in earnest, especially by someone higher, or by that which is highest of all—this, the humiliation of having to accept help unconditionally in every way, of having to become as if nothing in the hand of "the helper"[i] for whom all things are possible, or merely of having to give way to another person, of having to give up being oneself as long as one is seeking help: ah, there is certainly much suffering, even protracted and agonizing suffering, from which the self indeed does not shrink as it does from this, and which, if it is permitted to continue being itself, the self therefore fundamentally prefers.

But the more consciousness there is in a such a suffering person who in despair wills to be himself, the more the despair also intensifies itself and becomes demonic. Its origin is usually as follows: a self who in despair wills to be itself is in agony stemming from one or another pain that cannot in fact be taken away or be separated from his concrete self. It is precisely at this agony that he then directs the whole of his passion, which finally becomes a demonic rage. Now, even if God in heaven and all the angels offered to help him out of it—no, he would not have it, now it is too late. At one time, he would gladly have given everything to be free of this agony. He had been compelled to wait. Now it is after the fact: now, now he would rather rage against everything—he would rather be that one person in the

whole world who was unjustly treated by life, for whom it is of specific importance to make sure that he has his agony ready at hand, that no one takes it from him—for in that case he would of course be unable to prove to others and to convince himself that he is right. This, finally, lodges itself so firmly in his head **#[186]#** that he fears eternity for a quite peculiar reason, namely, that it would deprive him of his (demonically understood) infinite advantage over other people: his (demonically understood) justification for being the person he is. — Himself is what he wills to be; he began with the infinite abstraction of the self, and now he has finally become so concrete that it would be impossible to become eternal in that sense, and yet he wills in despair to be himself. Ah, demonic madness: he rages most at the thought that eternity could think of depriving him of his misery.

Despair of this sort is rarely seen in the world; such figures really appear only in the poets, that is, the real poets, who always endow their creations with “demonic” ideality (this term understood in the purely Greek sense). Nonetheless, such despair also occurs in real life. What, then, is the externality that corresponds to it? Well, there is nothing that “corresponds,” since an externality that corresponds to self-enclosure is a self-contradiction, for if it corresponds, it of course discloses. But here externality is a matter of complete indifference, here, where the self-enclosure—or what one could call an inwardness with a lock that has been jammed—is so clearly the feature that must command our attention. The lowest forms of despair, in which there was not really any inwardness—and concerning which, in any case, there is nothing to be said—the lowest forms of despair might be presented by describing or by saying something about the external characteristics of such a despairing person. But the more spiritual the despair, the more, in its self-enclosure, inwardness becomes a world unto itself, the more inconsequential are the external things under which the despair conceals itself. But precisely the more spiritual despair becomes, the more it itself is careful to employ demonic shrewdness in keeping the despair confined in self-enclosure, and therefore the more intent it is on making external things a matter of indifference, making them as insignificant and indifferent as possible. As in fairy tales, when the troll disappears through a crevice that no one can see, so, too, with despair: the more spiritual it is, the more important it is for it to live in something external behind which it ordinarily would never occur to anyone to search

for it. This concealment is indeed something spiritual and is among the protective measures taken to ensure having, as it were, behind actuality, an *en*closure, a world *ex*clusively[30] for oneself, **#[187]#** a world in which the despairing self is restlessly and tantalizing engaged in willing to be itself.

We began (α 1[i]) with the lowest form of despair: in despair not to will to be oneself. Demonic despair is the most intensified form of the despair, which in despair wills to be itself. This despair does not even will to be itself in stoical infatuation with itself and self-deification; it does not will to be itself in a manner that is admittedly mendacious, but that nonetheless is in a certain sense in accordance with its perfection; no, it wills to be itself in hatred of existence, to be itself in accordance with its misery; it does not even will to be itself in defiance, or defiantly, but to be itself in spite; it does not even will in defiance to wrest itself free of the power that established it —it spitefully wills to force itself upon it, to thrust itself upon it spite, wills to cling to it out of malice—and it is clear that a malicious objection must of course also take every precaution in sticking to that to which it is objecting. In rebelling against the whole of existence, it believes that it has found proof against it, against its goodness. The despairing person believes that he himself is this proof, and that is what he wills to be, that is why he wills to be himself, himself in his agony, in order, with this agony, to protest against the whole of existence. As the weak, despairing person will not hear anything of the consolation eternity has for him, neither will a despairing person of the above sort hear anything about it, but for a different reason: this very consolation would indeed be his downfall—as an objection against the whole of existence. To describe it figuratively, it is as if an author had made a slip of the pen and that this error became conscious of itself as such —perhaps, in fact, it had not really been a slip of the pen, but in a far higher sense an essential component of the entire presentation—and now it is as if this slip of the pen wanted to rebel against the author, preventing him, out of hatred, from making the correction, saying to him, in maniacal defiance: “No! I will not be erased, I will stand as a witness against you, a witness to the fact that you are a mediocre author.”

* And if you were to make psychological observations of actual life, you would occasionally get an opportunity to ascertain that this, which makes sense in thought and which thus shall and must prove to be correct, in fact does prove to be correct, and that this way of dividing the matter up covers the entire actuality of despair; for in connection with the child, we do not in fact speak of despair, but only of ill temper, because we are justified in presupposing that the eternal is present in the child only κατα δυναμιν,[i] and we are not justified in requiring of the child something that one may justifiably require of the adult, who shall possess it. I will not, however, by any means deny that forms of masculine despair can occur in women, and conversely, that feminine forms can occur in men—but these are exceptions. Of course, it is clear that ideal cases are in fact quite uncommon, and only in a purely ideal sense is this distinction between masculine and feminine despair entirely true. However greater a woman's sensitivity and fineness of feelings may be than a man's, she has neither the selfishly developed concept of the self nor, in a decisive sense, the intellectuality. On the other hand, the essence of woman is devotedness, selflessness, and if this is not the case, it is unfeminine. Curiously enough, no one can be so coy (and, of course, language coined this word specifically for woman), so almost cruelly fastidious, as a woman—and yet her nature is devotedness, and yet (this is precisely what is marvelous) all this is really the expression of the fact that her nature is devotedness. For precisely because her nature bears the whole of her feminine devotedness, nature has lovingly furnished her with an instinct of such fine sensitivity that, by comparison, the most brilliantly developed masculine reflection is as nothing. This, a woman's devotedness, this—were I to speak in Hellenic fashion—divine gift and treasure, is too great a good to be tossed about blindly, and yet no human reflection blessed with sight would be capable of seeing clearly enough to use it rightly. Nature, therefore, has taken her in its care: instinctively, she sees more clearly when blind than does the most sighted reflection; instinctively, she sees where she should direct her admiration and what it is to which she shall devote herself. Devotedness is woman's sole possession—therefore Nature took it upon itself to be her guardian. This is also why femininity first comes into being in a metamorphosis; it comes into being when infinite coyness transfigures itself as feminine devotedness. But the fact that devotedness is the woman's nature reappears in despair and returns as the mode of despair. She has lost herself in devotedness, and only as such is she happy, only as such is she herself; a woman who is happy without devotedness—that is, without giving of herself—regardless of what it is she gives herself to—is absolutely unfeminine. A man also gives of himself, and it is a poor specimen of a man who does not do so, but his self does not consist of devotedness (this is the expression of feminine substantive devotion), nor does he acquire his self through devotedness as, in another sense, the woman does—he has himself, he gives of himself, but his self still remains as a sober consciousness of the devotion, whereas the woman, in genuinely feminine fashion, throws herself into that to which she devotes herself. If this is taken away, then her self is also taken away, and her despair is: not to will to be oneself. — The man does not give of himself in this fashion, but the second form of despair also has a masculine expression: in despair not to will to be oneself.

So much for the relation between masculine and feminine despair. Nonetheless, it must be borne in mind that here the focus is not on devotion to God, or on the relation to God, which will first be treated in the Second Part. In the relation to God, where such differences as man-woman vanish,[i] it is the case, for the man as for the woman, that devotion is the self, and that the self is acquired through devotion. This holds equally for both man and woman, though it is likely that in actuality the woman most often relates herself to God only through the man.[ii]

* And therefore it is linguistically correct to say: to despair *over* the earthly (the occasion), *of* the eternal, but *over* oneself, because this again is another expression for whatever gives rise to despair

which, in accordance with its concept, is always *of* the eternal, while what one despairs *over* can be the most various sorts of things. One despairs *over* that which mires a person fast in despair (over one's misfortune, over the earthly, over the loss of one's fortune, etc.), but one despairs *of* that which, rightly understood, delivers a person out of despair (of the eternal, of one's salvation, of one's own strength, etc.). In relation to the self, one says both: to despair *over* and *of* oneself, because the self is doubly dialectical. And this is the obscurity which—especially in all lower forms of despair and in almost every despairing person—is such that he so passionately and clearly sees and knows what he despairs *over*, but what it is he despairs *of* escapes him. The condition for healing is always this *con*version;[23] and from a purely philosophical perspective, there could thus be a subtle question concerning whether it could be possible for a person to be in despair and be completely conscious what it is he despairs *of*.

* Furthermore, please note that from precisely this viewpoint it can be seen that much of what the world decks out under the name "resignation" is a species of despair, namely, in despair to will to be one's abstract self, in despair to will to let the eternal suffice, and thereby to be able to defy or ignore suffering in the earthly and temporal. The dialectic of resignation is really this: to will to be one's eternal self and then, in connection with something specific under which the self suffers, not to will to be oneself, consoling oneself because, after all, it may disappear in eternity, and thus feeling oneself justified in not assuming it in the temporal world: although it suffers under it, the self does not want to admit to it that it belongs to the self—that is, it will not humble itself under it in faith. Regarded as despair, resignation is thus essentially different from not willing to be oneself, for in despair one does will to be oneself, though with the exception of a single thing with respect to which one in despair does not will to be oneself.

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[i] Greek, "according to its potential."

[i] Latin, "for all faculties," "par excellence."

[i] Latin, "abstractly," "in the abstract."

[i] See Matt. 10:29; see also Luke 12:6.

[i] See Luke 9:25; see also Mark 8:36.

[i] See Luke 10:38–42.

[ii] German, "monotony."

[i] See Matt. 16:26.

[ii] Greek, "the infinite, unlimited—the finite, limited"; see Plato, *Philebus*, 30, in *Plato: The Collected Dialogues, Including the Letters*, ed. Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1961; abbreviated hereafter as *Plato: The Collected Dialogues*), pp. 1107–8.

[i] Greek, "according to its potential."

[i] See Matt. 19:26 and Mark 10:27.

[ii] German: "Beshrew thee, cousin, which didst lead me forth of that sweet way I was in to despair!" Kierkegaard cites the passage from the German translation by A. W. von Schlegel and Ludwig Tieck, *Shakspeare's dramatische Werke*, 12 vols. (Berlin, 1839–1841), vol. 1, p. 153. Note that in the Schlegel and Tieck translation, the passage appears in the third scene of act 3, while in the original English version it appears in the second scene.

[i] Latin, "as much as is needed"; the appropriate, necessary amount.

[i] Latin, “the truth is the criterion of itself and of what is false,” a saying often attributed to Spinoza, but which was in fact a widely cited maxim.
[i] Variant: “with respect to why” (Danish, *hvorfor*) appears in draft material in Kierkegaard’s hand and in the first printing as “from which” (Danish, *hvorfra*), a reading that also appears in the second Danish edition of Kierkegaard’s collected works. The present reading is preferred by the editors of *SKS*.
[i] Latin, meaning “self-murder.” Kierkegaard’s Danish is “*Selv*mordet,” literally, “*self*-murder.”
[ii] Greek transliteration, literally “last-first,” i.e., a figure of speech in which the natural or chronological order of terms is reversed.
[i] See pp. 19–21 in the present text.
[ii] See pp. 86–95 in the present text.
[i] Greek, “according to its potential.”
[i] Allusion to Gal. 3:28.
[ii] Allusion to 1 Cor. 11:3–16.
[i] Greek, “the other.”
[ii] Latin, “excess.”
[i] Goethe, *Faust*, pt. I, sc. 4: “While all about lie pastures fresh and green.”
[i] Latin, “we have been”; see Virgil, *Aeneid*, II, 325, “*fuimus Troes*” (once, we were Trojans).
[i] Variant: “spiritlessly” (Danish, *aandløst*) appears in the fair copy from Kierkegaard’s hand; the first printing has “spiritually” or “mentally” (Danish, *aandligt*).
[ii] Latin, “in the future.”
[iii] Latin, “in the past.”
[i] Latin, “as a whole.”
[i] See p. 86 in the present text.
[i] Latin, “hour by hour.”
[i] Latin, “completely, unconditionally in every respect.”
[i] Latin, “poetically.”
[ii] See p. 79 in the present text.
[i] See Gen. 1:1.
[i] See Matt. 16:19.
[ii] See 1 Cor. 9:26.
[i] See 2 Cor. 12:7–9.
[ii] Matt. 19:26.
[i] Presumably an allusion to Heb. 13:6.
[i] See p. 64 in the present text.

#[188]#

SECOND PART

Despair Is Sin

#[190]#

#[191]#

A

DESPAIR IS SIN

Sin is: *before God, or with the conception of God, in despair not to will to be oneself, or in despair to will to be oneself.* Sin is thus intensified weakness or intensified defiance: sin is the intensification of despair. The point of emphasis is: *before God*, or that the conception of God is included; that which makes sin, dialectically, ethically, religiously, into what jurists call "aggravated" despair is the conception of God.

Even though the present part, and least of all section A, is not the place for psychological sketches (nor is there room for such), mention may nonetheless be made here of the most dialectical boundary area between despair and sin—of what could be called a poet-existence tending toward the religious, an existence that has something in common with the despair of resignation, except that the conception of God is present in it. As can be seen from the conjunction and position of the categories, a poet-existence of this sort will be a poet-existence of the most eminent sort. From a Christian point of view, every poet-existence (all aesthetics notwithstanding) is sin, the sin of poetizing instead of being, of relating oneself to the good and the true by way of imagination instead of being it—that is, existentially striving to be it. The poet-existence with which we here concern ourselves differs from despair in that it includes the conception of God, or that it is before God; but it is enormously dialectical, as if there were an impenetrable dialectical tangle concerning the degree to which it is obscurely conscious of being sin. A poet of this sort can have a very deep religious craving, and the conception of God is incorporated in his despair. He loves God above

everything, God who is his only consolation in his secret agony, and # **[192]#** yet he loves the agony—he will not let go of it. He wants very much to be himself before God, but not with respect to the fixed point concerning which the self suffers—there, in despair, he does not will to be himself; he hopes that eternity will remove it, and here in the temporal realm, no matter how much he suffers under it, he cannot resolve to take it upon himself and humble himself under it in faith. And yet he continues to relate himself to God, and this is his sole salvation; to have to do without God would be the greatest of terrors for him—"it would be something to despair over"; and yet he actually permits himself (though perhaps unconsciously) to alter God poetically into something a little other than what God is, a bit more of a fond father who is altogether too indulgent in granting the child's—only wish. As a person unhappy in love became a poet blissfully praising the happiness of love, *he* became the poet of religiousness. He became unhappy in religiousness; he understands obscurely that it is required of him that he let go of this agony—that is, that he humble himself under it in faith and take it upon himself as a part of the self—for he wants to distance it from himself, and precisely in doing so, he clings to it, even though he indeed believes (something that, like every word from a person in despair, is correct—in reverse—and thus must be understood backward) that this must mean that he is to separate himself from it, to escape from it, as much as is possible for a person. But to take it upon himself in faith, this is something he cannot do, that is, this is something that, in the final analysis, he does not want to do—or, this is where his self ends in obscurity. But as with the aforementioned poet's description of love, so does this poet's description of the religious possess an enchantment, a lyrical flight such as is possessed by no married man and no reverend. Nor is what he says untrue, by any means: what he presents is simply his happier, his better "I." In relation to the religious he is an unhappy lover; that is, he is not a believer in strict sense; he possesses only the first part of faith: despair—and in it a fervent longing for the religious. His conflict is really this: Has he been called? Does the thorn in the flesh mean that he is to be used for the extraordinary? Before God, is it entirely in order that he has become this extraordinary person? Or is the thorn in the flesh[i] something under which he is to humble himself in order to attain what is universally human? — But enough of this, I can say

with the emphasis of truth: To whom am I speaking? Such psychological investigations to the nth degree—who bothers about them? People are better able to understand the Nürnberg pictures[1] painted by the priest; # **[193]#** they bear a deceptive resemblance to anyone and everyone, to people as they are in general and, spiritually understood, to nothing.

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[i] See 2 Cor. 12:7–9.

Chapter One

THE GRADATIONS IN THE CONSCIOUSNESS OF THE SELF

(THE QUALIFICATION: BEFORE GOD)

The preceding part continuously pointed out increasing levels in the consciousness of the self. First came unconsciousness of having an eternal self (C. B. a.[i]), then knowledge of having a self in which there is at any rate something eternal (C. B. b.[ii]), and then, gradations were in turn pointed out under this rubric (α. 1–2. β.[iii]). This entire consideration must now be turned dialectically in a new direction. This is the situation: the gradations within the consciousness of the self with which we have concerned ourselves thus far lie within the category of the human self, or the self whose standard of measure[1] is the human being. But this self takes on a new quality and qualification by being a self directly before God. This self is no longer the merely human self but is what—in the hope of not being misunderstood—I would call the theological self, the self directly before

God. And what infinite reality the self acquires by being conscious of itself as existing directly before God, by becoming a human self whose standard of measure is God! A cowhand who (if this were possible) is a self directly before cattle is a very low self; similarly, a ruler who is a self directly before slaves is really no self—for in both cases the criterion is lacking. When he becomes a man, the child (who previously had only his parents as a criterion) becomes a self by acquiring the state as his criterion; but what an infinite emphasis falls upon the self by acquiring God as a criterion! The criterion for the self is always that directly before which it is a self, but of course this in turn is the definition of what a "criterion" is. Just as one can add like things only to like, so is every thing qualitatively that by which it is measured; and that which, qualitatively, is its criterion, is, ethically, its goal;[2] and the criterion and the goal are, qualitatively, what a thing is—though this does not apply to the way things are in the world of freedom, where, if a person has failed to be qualitatively that which is his goal and his criterion, he must have brought this disqualification upon himself, so # **[194]#** that with respect to passing judgment, the goal and the criterion remain the same, making it clear what he is not: namely, that which is his goal and criterion.

It was a very correct notion to which, in earlier periods, dogmatics frequently resorted (while more recent dogmatics have objected to dogmatics because dogmatics did not understand it or have a sense for it)—it was a very correct notion, even if it was occasionally applied improperly: that what made sin into something frightful was the fact that it is before God.[3] It was on this basis that they then proved that punishment in hell was eternal. Later, people became clever and said: "Sin is sin; sin is not greater because it is against God or before God." How odd! even jurists speak of aggravated crimes, even jurists make a distinction concerning whether, for example, a crime is committed against a government official or against a private citizen; they make a distinction between the punishment for murder of one's father and for ordinary murder.

No, the older dogmatics were right in saying that sin was infinitely intensified by the fact that it was against God. What was mistaken was that people regarded God as something external and that they appeared to assume that only some sins were against God. But God is not something

external in the sense that a police officer is. What must be noted is that the self has a conception of God and that it nonetheless does not will as he wills and thus is disobedient. Nor is it the case that it is only now and then that sin is before God,[4] for every sin is before God, or, more correctly, that which really makes human guilt into sin is that the guilty person has the consciousness of existing before God.

Despair is intensified in proportion to consciousness of the self; but the self is intensified in proportion to the criterion for the self and is intensified infinitely when God is the criterion. The greater the conception of God, the more self; the more self, the greater the conception of God. Only when a self, as this specific individual self, is itself conscious of existing before God, only then is it the infinite self; and this self then sins before God. Therefore, despite everything that can be said about it, the selfishness of paganism is not nearly as aggravated as that of Christendom, insofar as selfishness can in fact be found there, for the pagan did not have his self directly before God. The pagan and the natural human being have the merely human self as their criterion. Thus, from a higher point of view, one can certainly be correct in regarding the pagan world as lying in sin, but paganism's sin was really despairing **#[195]#** ignorance about God, about existing before God; it is: "to be without God in the world."[i] From another perspective, it is therefore true that in the strictest sense, the pagan did not sin because he did not sin before God, and all sin is before God. Moreover, in a sense it is also quite certain that, many a time, a pagan has been helped to slip through the world irreproachably simply because he was rescued by his frivolous Pelagian notion;[5] but then his sin was something else: that frivolous Pelagian notion. On the other hand, viewed from another angle, it is also quite certain that in many cases, precisely by having had a strict Christian upbringing, a person has in a certain sense been plunged into sin because the entire Christian view was too serious for him, especially at an early age; but then, in another sense, this was itself something of a help to him, this more profound notion of what sin is.

Sin is: before God in despair not to will to be oneself, or before God in despair to will to be oneself. But is this definition—even if in other respects it is perhaps conceded that it has its merits (the most important among them being that it is the only one supported by Scripture, for Scripture always

defines sin as disobedience)—is it not too spiritual? To this, the reply must be, first and foremost: A definition of sin can never be too spiritual (unless it becomes so spiritual that it abolishes sin), for sin is precisely a qualification of spirit. And next: Why is it supposedly too spiritual? Because it does not speak of murder, theft, fornication, and the like?[i] But doesn't it, in fact, speak of them? Are they not also forms of willful opposition to God, disobedience that defies his commandments? But on the other hand when, in speaking of sin, one speaks only of sins such as these, it is so easily forgotten that things of this sort, which are matters of "to a certain degree," can be in order from the human point of view, and yet the whole of life be sin, sin of the well-known sort: the glittering vices,[6] the willful opposition which either spiritlessly or defiantly continues to be—or wills to be—in ignorance with respect to the infinitely greater sense in which a human self is obligated to be obedient to God with respect to its most hidden wishes and thoughts, with respect to a readiness to grasp and a willingness to follow even the least indication from God as to what his will is for this self. The sins of the flesh are the willfulness of the lower self, but how often is it not the case that a devil is driven out with the devil's help,[i] and the end is worse than the beginning.[ii] For indeed, this is precisely how things go in the world: first, a person sins out of frailty and weakness, and # **[196]#** then—yes, then he perhaps learns to take refuge in God and is helped to the faith that saves from all sin—but that is not what we are talking about here: then he despairs over his weakness and either becomes a Pharisee, who in despair pushes things to a sort of legal righteousness, or in despair casts himself once again into sin.

Therefore, the definition indeed covers every conceivable and every actual form of sin; though of course it properly emphasizes the decisive point, that sin is despair (for sin is not the unruliness of flesh and blood,[7] but is the spirit's consent to that unruliness) and is: before God. As a definition it is algebraic; in this brief treatise it would be out of place—and furthermore, it would be an effort that would necessarily fail—if I were to begin to describe specific, individual sins. Here the most important thing is simply that the definition be like a net that covers all forms. And this it does, which can indeed be seen when one tests it by setting forth its opposite, the definition of faith, by which I steer my course throughout this

work as from a fixed navigation point. Faith is: that the self, in being itself and in willing to be itself, is grounded transparently in God.

But indeed, this fact has often been overlooked: that the opposite of sin is by no means virtue. That is to some extent a pagan view, which is satisfied with a merely human criterion that is in fact ignorant of what sin is, that all sin is before God. No, *the opposite of sin is faith*, as is therefore stated in Romans 14:23: "Whatsoever is not of faith is sin." And this is one of the definitions that is decisive for the whole of Christianity: that the opposite of sin is not virtue, but faith.

Appendix

That the definition of sin contains within itself the possibility of offense; a general observation concerning offense

THE OPPOSITION: SIN—FAITH IS the Christian one which refashions all ethical concepts in a Christian manner, providing them with an additional extension of their range. This opposition rests upon the decisive Christian stipulation "before God," a determinant which in turn includes the decisive Christian criterion: the absurd, the paradox, the possibility of offense. And it is of utmost importance that this be pointed out **#[197]#** in every definition of Christianity, because offense is Christianity's weapon against all speculation.[8] Where, then, is the possibility of offense in this? It is that a human being should have this reality: the reality of existing, as *an individual* human being, directly before God, and therefore, in turn, what follows from this: that a human being's sin should be of concern to God. This matter of the individual human being—before God—is something that speculation will never get into its head; it merely universalizes individual human beings imaginatively into the race. This was also precisely why a faithless Christianity invented the notion that sin is sin, and that it makes no difference whether or not it is before God. In other words, they wanted to get rid of the qualification "before God," and to this end they came up with a higher wisdom which, curiously enough, was neither more nor less than what higher wisdom indeed is most often: the paganism of antiquity.

Now, it is often said that people are offended by Christianity because it is so gloomy and dark, offended by it because it is so strict, etc.; what would be most correct, however, would be to explain, for once, that the real reasons a person is offended by Christianity are that it is too lofty, that its goal is not a human being's goal, that it wants to make the human being into something so extraordinary that he cannot get it into his head. A quite simple psychological exposition of what offense is will explain this and will in addition show how infinitely foolishly people have behaved in defending Christianity by having removed the offense; how people have, stupidly or impudently, ignored Christ's own instruction which frequently, and with great concern, warns against the offense[i]—that is, he himself points out that the possibility of offense is there and must be there, for if it did not have to be there, if it were not an eternal, essential component of Christianity, then it is of course human nonsense for Christ to be concerned and to warn against it instead of removing it.

If I were to imagine a poor day laborer and the mightiest emperor who ever lived, and that this mightiest of emperors suddenly had the idea of sending for the day laborer, who indeed had never dreamt, "and neither had it entered into his heart"[ii] that the emperor knew he existed, and who would indeed count himself indescribably fortunate merely to be permitted one day to see the emperor, in which case it would be something he would relate to his children and grandchildren as the most important event in his life—if the emperor were to send for him and inform him that he wanted to have him **#[198]#** as his son-in-law—what then? Then, in human fashion, the day laborer would become somewhat—or very much—awkward, embarrassed, and self-conscious; in human fashion, it would (and this is what is human about it) seem to him something extremely odd, mad, something he would least of all dare tell anyone else, for in his heart of hearts, he himself was already close to settling upon an explanation that might soon be eagerly taken up by his next-door neighbors and the people across the way: that the emperor wanted to make a fool of him, so that the day laborer would become an object of ridicule for the entire town—he would be depicted in the newspaper, the tale of his engagement to the emperor's daughter would be sold by the market women who hawk popular verses. But this matter of his becoming the emperor's son-in-law: would that it might become public

knowledge as soon as possible, so that the day laborer could ascertain through his senses whether the emperor is serious about it or merely wants to get the better of the poor fellow, make him unhappy for the rest of his life, and help him end up in the madhouse, for here there is a quid nimis[i] that can so infinitely easily turn into its opposite. A little indication of favor, that is something the day laborer could get into his head; it would be understood in the market town,[9] by the esteemed, cultivated public, by all the market women who hawk popular verses, in short, by the five times one hundred thousand people who lived in that market town which, true enough, with respect to the size of its population, was indeed even a very large city —though, on the other hand, with respect to having an understanding of and a sense for what is extraordinary, was a very small market town—but this, this matter of becoming a son-in-law, yes, this was much too much. And now, suppose that the matter under consideration was not an external reality, but an internal one, so that facticity could not help the day laborer gain certainty, but faith itself was the only facticity, and thus everything was left to faith, left to whether he had sufficient humble courage to dare believe it (for brazen courage does not help one have *faith*): How many day laborers would there be, indeed, who had this courage? But the one who lacked this courage, he would be offended; to him, the extraordinary would sound almost like a mockery of him. Then, perhaps he would confess, honestly and straightforwardly: “This sort of thing is too lofty for me. I cannot get it into my head. To tell the truth, it seems like foolishness to me.”[i]

And now Christianity! Christianity teaches that this individual human being, and thus every individual human being, whether he happens to be a man, woman, serving maid, cabinet minister, merchant, barber, university student, etc., this individual human being exists *before God*—this individual human being, **#[199]#** who would perhaps be proud of having once in his life spoken with the king, this human being who does not in the least imagine that he is on confidential terms with this person or that person, this human being exists before God, can speak with God at any moment he wishes, certain of being heard by him—in short, this human being is offered the opportunity to live on the most intimate terms with God! Moreover, for this person—indeed, for this person’s sake—God comes to the world, lets

himself be born, suffer, and die; and this suffering God practically begs and pleads that this person at least accept the help that is offered him! Truly, if there is anything over which to lose one's reason, it is indeed surely this! Every person who does not have the humble courage to dare to believe this—he is offended. But why is he offended? Because it is too lofty for him, because he cannot get it into his head, because, when faced with it, he cannot summon up his frank and cheerful manner, and therefore he must get rid of it, have it annihilated, made into madness and nonsense, for it seems as if it will suffocate him.

For what is offense? Offense is unhappy admiration. It is thus related to envy, but it is an envy that turns against oneself—in an even stricter sense, it is worst against oneself. The selfishly narrow heart of the natural human being cannot permit itself to accept the extraordinary that God has intended for him; so he is offended.

Now, the degree of offense depends on the passion of a person's admiration. More prosaic people, who are lacking in imagination and passion, and who therefore are not really fitted for admiring—they, too, are certainly offended, but they limit themselves to saying: "I cannot really get that sort of thing into my head, I will let it be." These are the skeptics. But the more passion and imagination a person has—the closer he is in a certain sense (namely, in possibility) to being able to have faith, n.b. by humbling himself under the extraordinary in adoration—the more passionate the offense, which, finally, cannot be satisfied with anything short of getting this exterminated, annihilated, trodden into the dust.

If you want to gain an understanding of offense, then study human envy, a course of study I offer as an outside field for my examinations, and I daresay that I have studied it thoroughly. Envy is concealed admiration. An admirer who feels that he cannot become happy in devoting himself to the object of his admiration chooses to become envious of what he admires. Then he speaks a different language; in this language he now says that what he really admires is nothing, something stupid and insipid and odd and overwrought. **#[200]#** Admiration is happy self-surrender, envy is unhappy self-assertion.

Thus, too, with offense, for what is "admiration/envy" in the relation between one human being and another is "adoration/offense" in the relation

between God and a human being. The summa summarum[i] of all human wisdom is this “golden”[10]—or perhaps more correctly, this gold-plated—ne quid nimis:[ii] too little or too much ruins everything. This is received and passed on as wisdom from one person to another, it is honored with admiration, its exchange rate never fluctuates, its value is guaranteed by the entire human race. Then if, once in a while, there is a genius who goes a bit over the line: he is declared mad—by those who are shrewd and clever. But Christianity takes an enormous giant step beyond this *ne quid nimis*, into the absurd; that is the beginning point for Christianity—and offense.

It can now be seen how extraordinarily (so that at least something that is extraordinary might remain) stupid it is to defend Christianity, what little knowledge of human beings it reveals, how doing so—even if unconsciously—colludes with offense by making Christianity into a sort of miserable thing which *am Ende*[iii] needs to be rescued with a defense. It is therefore quite certain and true that the person who first came up with the idea of defending Christianity in Christendom is de facto a Judas no. 2; he, too, betrays with a kiss, except that his treason is that of stupidity. To defend something is always to disparage it. Suppose someone had a warehouse full of gold, and suppose he was willing to give away every ducat of it to the poor—but suppose, too, that he was foolish enough to launch this charitable undertaking of his with a defense in which he set forth three reasons justifying his action: it would not take much for people almost to begin to have doubts about whether what he was doing was an act of charity. But now take Christianity! Indeed, the person who defends it has never believed in it. If he believes, then the enthusiasm of faith is—not a defense, no, it is attack and victory; a believer is a victor.

This is how it is with Christianity and offense. Its possibility, then, is truly present in the Christian definition of sin. It is this: before God. A pagan, the natural human being, is quite willing to concede that sin exists, but this “before God,” which, after all, is what really makes sin into sin—this is too much for him. To him, it is (even if in a manner other than that shown here) making much too much of what it **#[201]#** is to be a human being; if it were a bit less, he could go along with it—“but too much is too much.”

[i] See pp. 55–61 in the present text.
[ii] See pp. 62–64 in the present text.
[iii] See pp. 64–95 in the present text.
[i] See Eph. 2:12.
[i] A reference to Gal. 5:21.
[i] See Matt. 12:22–32.
[ii] See Matt. 12:45 and Luke 11:26.
[i] See Matt. 11:6, 26:31, and John 6:61.
[ii] See 1 Cor. 2:9.
[i] Latin, “something too much.”
[i] See 1 Cor. 1:18–31.
[i] Latin, literally “the sum of sums,” the final result, the upshot.
[ii] Latin, “nothing too much.”
[iii] German, “in the end,” “in the final analysis.”

Chapter Two

THE SOCRATIC DEFINITION OF SIN

Sin is ignorance. This, as is well-known, is the Socratic definition[1] which like everything Socratic is always an authority worthy of attention. However, in connection with this Socratic point, as with so many of Socrates' other views, people have learned to feel a need to go further.[2] How many countless numbers of people have not felt an urge to go further than this Socratic ignorance[3]—presumably because they felt that it was impossible for them to remain standing at that point; for how many are there, really, in any generation who were able to endure expressing ignorance existentially about everything, even for just one month?

Therefore I certainly will not dismiss the Socratic definition on the grounds that one cannot remain standing at that point; rather, precisely because the Socratic definition is so genuinely Greek, with the Christian position in mente,[i] I will make use of the Socratic definition in order to place Christianity in sharp focus, so that here, as always, every other definition that is not strictly Christian in the strictest sense—that is, every halfway definition—will exhibit its emptiness.

Now, what is suspect about the Socratic definition is that it allows a more detailed understanding of this ignorance, of its origin, etc., to remain unclear. This means that even if sin is ignorance (or what Christianity might

prefer to call stupidity), which in one sense simply cannot be denied: Is this an original ignorance—that is, is this condition that of a person who has not known and who has not been able to know anything about the truth—or is it a produced, a later ignorance? If it is the latter, then sin must of course be rooted in something other than ignorance, it must be rooted in the act by which a person has obscured his knowledge. But even if this is assumed, the obstinate and tenacious irregularity recurs, for the question remains as to whether, at the moment he began to obscure his knowledge, the person was clearly **#[202]#** conscious of doing so. If he was not clearly conscious of it, then his knowledge had of course already been obscured before he began doing it, and the question merely arises once again. On the other hand, if it is assumed that, at the point when he began to obscure his knowledge, he was clearly aware of what he was doing, then sin (even if it is ignorance, insofar as that is the result) is of course rooted not in knowledge, but in the will, and the question that necessarily arises concerns the relation of knowledge and will to one another. With all such considerations (and here one could continue questioning for many days) the Socratic definition does not really concern itself. Socrates was certainly an ethicist (something with which antiquity of course unconditionally credits him: the inventor of ethics),[4] the first one, as he is and remains the first of his kind, but he begins with ignorance. Intellectually, he tends toward ignorance, toward knowing nothing. Ethically, what he understands by ignorance is something completely different, and thus he begins with that. But on the other hand, Socrates, quite naturally, is not an essentially religious ethicist, even less is he what a Christian ethicist would be: a dogmatist. Therefore, he never really enters at all into the investigation with which Christianity begins, does not enter into the prius[i] in which sin presupposes itself and which Christianity explains with the dogma of inherited sin,[5] though in the present investigation we come only to the boundary of that dogma.

Socrates therefore does not really come to the category of sin, which is certainly problematic in connection with a definition of sin. How can this be? If, in fact, sin is ignorance, then of course sin does not really exist, for of course sin is precisely consciousness. If sin is ignorance of what is right, so that one therefore does what is wrong, then sin does not exist. If this is what sin is, then we assume what Socrates also assumed: that it cannot

happen that someone, knowing what is right, does what is wrong, or, knowing that something is wrong, does what is wrong.[6] Thus, if the Socratic definition is correct, then sin simply does not exist. But look, from a Christian standpoint this is entirely in order, and in a deeper sense entirely correct; in the interest of Christianity it is quod erat demonstrandum.[ii] The concept by which Christianity most decisively and qualitatively differentiates itself from paganism is, precisely: sin, the doctrine of sin, and therefore Christianity supposes—again, entirely consistently—that neither paganism nor the natural man knows what sin is; indeed, it assumes that there must be a revelation from God in order to make manifest what sin is. Indeed, it is not **#[203]#** the case, as superficial observation assumes, that the doctrine of the atonement is what constitutes the qualitative difference between paganism and Christianity. No, the beginning must be made far deeper, with sin, with the doctrine of sin, as Christianity indeed does. What a damaging objection against Christianity it would have to be, then, if paganism had a definition of sin that Christianity was compelled to acknowledge as correct.

What sort of a category is it, then, that Socrates lacks in defining sin? It is the will, defiance. Greek intellectuality was too happy, too naïve, too aesthetic, too ironic, too witty—too sinful to get it into its head that a person could knowingly refrain from doing the good, or knowingly, with knowledge of the right thing to do, do wrong. The Greek mentality proposes an intellectual categorical imperative.[7]

By no means ought the truth of this be overlooked, and it is surely necessary to emphasize this in times such as these, which have run wild in so terribly empty and self-important and fruitless knowledge, so it is certainly the case that now—entirely as in Socrates' time, only more so—it is necessary that people be starved out a bit in Socratic fashion.[8] It is enough to make one laugh and weep, all these assurances of having understood and grasped what is highest, plus the virtuosity with which many people know how to present it in abstracto,[i] in a certain sense entirely correctly—it is enough to make one laugh and weep when one then sees that all this knowledge and understanding exercises no power whatsoever over peoples' lives, that they do not in the least way express what they have understood, but rather the opposite. At the sight of this

inconsistency, which is as pathetic as it is ludicrous, one involuntarily cries out: “But how in all the world is it in fact possible that they could have understood it? And is it indeed true that they have?” To this, the old ironist and ethicist[9] replies: “O, dear friend, don’t ever believe it; they have not understood it, for if they had truly understood it, their lives would also have expressed it, they would have done what they had understood.”

To understand and to understand—are they two different things, then? Exactly so; and the person who has understood this—though, to be sure, not in the sense of the first sort of understanding—is eo ipso[i] initiated into all the secrets of irony. It is really this contradiction with which irony is occupied. To regard as comic the fact that a person is actually ignorant of something is a very low form of the comic and is beneath irony’s dignity. There is really nothing profoundly comic in the fact that there have lived people who believed that the earth stood **#[204]#** still—when they didn’t know any better. Presumably something similar will in turn happen to our age in comparison with an age that possesses greater knowledge of the physical universe. The contradiction is between two different eras; there is no deeper point at which they coincide—a contradiction of this sort is not essential and thus neither is it essentially comical. No, but when a person stands there and says the right thing (and thus has understood it), and then, when he is to act, does the wrong thing (and thus shows that he has not understood it): yes, that is infinitely comical. It is infinitely comical that a person who is moved to the point of tears, so that not only sweat, but tears, too, are pouring from him: that he can sit and read or listen to an account of self-denial, of the nobility of sacrificing one’s life for the truth—and then, at the next instant, *ein*, *zwei*, *drei*, *vupti*,[ii] almost with tears still in his eyes, he is fully engaged, in the sweat of his brow[iii] and to the best of his abilities, with helping untruth to triumph. It is infinitely comical that an orator, whose voice and expression radiate truth, who is profoundly moved and profoundly moving, who presents the truth in heartrending fashion, who confronts every evil, the forces of hell, face to face, with a certainty in his stance, a courageous gaze, and an admirable propriety in his step—it is infinitely comical that, at almost that very instant, almost while still wearing his Adrienne,[10] he is capable, in cowardly and fearful fashion, of running away from the least little difficulty. It is infinitely comical that someone can

understand the entire truth about how wretched and petty the world is, etc.—that he can understand this and then cannot recognize what he has understood; for at almost that very instant he himself goes off and participates in the same pettiness and wretchedness, is honored by it and accepts the honor: that is, acknowledges it. Ah, when one sees a person[11] who gives assurances that he has understood completely how Christ went about in the form of a lowly servant,[i] poor, despised, mocked, as Scripture says: spat upon[ii]—when I then see that same person so painstakingly seek out the place where, in the worldly sense, it is pleasant to be,[iii] and ensconce himself there in complete security, when I see him so anxiously—as if it were a matter of life and death—avoiding every unfavorable gust of wind from the right or left, so happy, so extremely happy, so madly happy—indeed, to top it off, so madly happy that, profoundly moved, he even thanks God for it, for being unreservedly honored and esteemed by everyone, everyone: then I have often said to myself and by myself: "Socrates, Socrates, Socrates, how could it be possible that this person has understood what he says he has understood?" This is what I have said—indeed, I have, furthermore, wished that **#[205]#** Socrates was right. For it seems to me, after all, as if Christianity were too rigorous, nor can I make turning such a man into a hypocrite comport with my own experience. No, Socrates, you I can understand; you make him into a joker, a sort of merry fellow; you make him a prey of ridicule; you have no objection to my preparing him and serving him up comically—indeed, you applaud—provided I do it well.

Socrates, Socrates, Socrates! Yes, one may surely say your name three times; it wouldn't be too much to say it ten times, if it would be of any help. People think the world needs a republic,[12] and people think it needs a new social order and a new religion: but no one thinks that, after all, a Socrates is surely what is needed by this world, confused as it is with knowledge. But it goes without saying that if anyone thought of that—not to mention if many thought of it—he would be less needed. What an error needs most is always what it thinks of least—naturally, for otherwise it of course would not be an error.

Therefore an ironical-ethical corrective such as this is something for which there could be a great need in our age, is perhaps the only thing it

really needs—for it is obvious that this is what it least thinks about; instead of going further than Socrates, it is very necessary that we simply return to this Socratic saying: to understand and to understand are two different things—not as a conclusion that ultimately helps people who are in the most profound misery (for it simply abolishes the difference between to understand and to understand), but as the ethical understanding of daily life.

The Socratic definition, then, helps itself in the following way. When someone does not do what is right, then neither has he understood it; his understanding is an illusion; the assurance he gives of having understood it is a false indication of direction; his repeated assurances that he damn well did understand it are a very, very long distance down the most circuitous detour possible. But then the definition is indeed correct. If someone does what is right, he certainly does not sin; and if he does not do what is right, then neither has he understood it. Had he truly understood it, it would quickly have moved him to do it, quickly have made him into an acoustic figure[13] of what he understood: ergo sin is ignorance.

But where, then, is the defect lodged? It is lodged at a point of which the Socratic position is itself aware and which it remedies, though only to a certain degree: that it lacks a dialectical specification concerning the transition from having understood something to doing it. In this transition is the beginning of **#[206]#** Christianity. Then, in continuing along this path, it is shown that sin lies in the will, arriving at the concept of defiance—and then, in order to fasten the end of the thread properly, it adds the dogma of inherited sin[14]—for alas, the secret of the speculative way of comprehending things consists precisely in sewing without making the end fast and without knotting the thread, and therefore—amazingly—it can continue sewing and sewing, i.e., pulling the thread through. Christianity, on the other hand, makes the end fast with the assistance of the paradox.

In pure ideality, which does not concern itself with the actual individual human being, transitions[15] happen by necessity (in the System,[16] of course, everything takes place by necessity[17]), or there is no difficulty whatsoever connected with the transition from understanding to doing. This is the Greek mentality (though not the Socratic, for Socrates is too much of an ethicist for that). And the whole secret of modern philosophy[18] is really the same, for it is this cogito ergo sum,[i] to think is to be (the Christian

position, on the other hand, is this: “Let it be done for you according to your faith,”[ii] or as you have faith, so you are; to have faith is to be). Thus we see that modern philosophy is neither more nor less than paganism. And this is not even the worst of it; kinship with Socrates is not the worst of things. But what is utterly un-Socratic about modern philosophy is that it wants to imagine, and wants us to imagine, that this is Christianity.

On the other hand, in the actual world, where it involves the individual human being, there is this tiny little transition from having understood to doing; it is not always cito citissime,[iii] it is not (if unable to speak philosophically, I must speak German) *geschwind wie der Wind*.[iv] On the contrary, here begins a very long-winded story.

There is no standing still in the life of the spirit (neither is there any state of affairs[19]—everything is actuality); if a person, at the very same second that he knows the right thing, does not do it—well, then, first of all, his knowledge comes off the boil. And next comes the question of what the will thinks of this knowledge. The will is dialectical and, in turn, has beneath itself the entire lower nature of a person. Now, if it does not like this knowledge, it does not indeed follow that the will goes and does the opposite of what was understood by this knowledge—such powerful contrasts are probably rather infrequent. But then the will lets some time pass; there is an interim called: “Well, we’ll wait until tomorrow and see.” During all this, knowing becomes more and more obscured, and the lower nature is **#[207]#** increasingly victorious; for the good, alas, must be done immediately, immediately, as soon as it is known (and that is why in pure ideality the transition from thinking to being goes so easily, because there everything is immediate), but the strength of the lower nature consists in dragging things out. Little by little, the will becomes less opposed to what is happening—it almost looks the other way. And then, when knowing has been sufficiently obscured—then knowing and the will are better able to understand one another; finally, they agree completely, for then knowing has gone over to the will’s side and acknowledges that what it wants is entirely right. And perhaps this is how a great many people live: little by little, they work at obscuring their ethical and ethical-religious knowledge, which together would lead them toward decisions and consequences with which their lower nature is not enamored; on the other hand, they expand

their aesthetic and metaphysical knowledge, which, from the ethical point of view, is a diversion.

Still, with all this we have not yet come further than to the Socratic position, for, Socrates would say, if this happens, it simply shows that a person of this sort has not in fact understood what is right. This means that the Greek mentality lacks the courage to say that a person knowingly does what is wrong—that, knowing what is right, a person does what is wrong: so it helps itself by saying, "If someone does what is wrong, it is because he has not understood what is right."

It is quite true that no *human being* can come any further than this: on his own, and of himself, no human being can say what sin is, precisely because he is in sin. All his talk about sin is fundamentally an extenuation of sin, an excuse, a sinful toning-down. For this reason, Christianity indeed begins in another way: a revelation from God is necessary in order to enlighten a person as to what sin is: that sin does not in fact come from a person's not having understood what is right, but from his unwillingness to understand it and his unwillingness to do what is right.

Even with respect to the distinction between being *unable* to understand and being *unwilling* to understand, Socrates does not really provide any enlightenment, whereas he is the grand master of all ironists when it comes to making use of the distinction between understanding and understanding.[20] Socrates explains that when a person does not do what is right, he has not understood it, either;[21] but Christianity goes a bit further back and says that this is because he is unwilling to understand it, and this, in turn, is because he is unwilling to do what is right. Next, it teaches that a person does what is wrong (actual defiance) despite the fact that he understands what is right, or that he refrains from doing what is right despite the fact that he understands it;[i] **#[208]#** in short, the Christian doctrine of sin is a direct insult to the human being—accusation upon accusation, it is the charge that the Deity, as prosecutor, permits itself to lodge against the human being.

But can any human being comprehend this Christianity? Absolutely not—of course, this, too, is indeed Christianity, thus it is fraught with offense. It must be believed. "Comprehending" is the extent of a human being's relation to human matters, but "believing" is the human being's relation to

the Deity. How, then, does Christianity explain this incomprehensibility? Entirely consistently, in a manner that is equally incomprehensible—by enlisting the aid of revelation.

Thus, Christianity understands that sin lies in the will, not in knowing; and this corruption of the will affects the individual's consciousness. This is entirely consistent, for otherwise the question of how sin began would have to arise for each individual.

Here, once again, we have the mark of offense. The possibility of offense is inherent in the fact that a revelation from God is required in order to enlighten the human being about what sin is and how deeply it is lodged.[22] The natural human being, the pagan, thinks as follows: "All right, I admit that I haven't understood everything in heaven and on earth. If a revelation is needed, then let it enlighten us about heavenly things. But that a revelation is needed in order to inform us about what sin is—that is the most unreasonable of all things. I don't pretend to be a perfect person, far from it, but this is something I know, and I am willing to concede how far I am from being perfect: so am I, then, not supposed to know what sin is?" But Christianity replies, "No, what you know least of all is how far you are from being perfect and what sin is." — Look, in this sense, from a Christian point of view, it is in fact true that sin is ignorance: it is ignorance of what sin is.

The definition of sin given in the previous chapter therefore still needs to be completed as follows: Sin is, after having been enlightened by a revelation from God concerning what sin is, before God in despair not to will to be oneself, or in despair to will to be oneself. **#[209]#**

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[i] Latin, "in mind."
[i] Latin, "prior state."
[ii] Latin, "that which was to be demonstrated."
[i] Latin, "in the abstract."
[i] Latin, "by that very fact."
[ii] German, "as quickly as one, two, three, presto."
[iii] Allusion to Gen. 3:18–19.
[i] See Phil. 2:7.
[ii] See Luke 18:32 and Matt. 27:30.
[iii] Allusion to Matt. 17:4 and Mark 9:5.

[i] See, e.g., ch. 4 in Descartes, *Discourse on the Method*, pt. 4, in *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, trans. John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, and Dugald Murdoch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 2:127, “I am thinking, therefore I exist.”

[ii] See Matt. 8:13 and 9:29.

[iii] Latin, “quickly, very quickly” (also meaning, when written on the envelope of a letter, “express, extreme express”).

[iv] German, “fast as the wind.”

[i] See Rom. 7:14–21.

Chapter Three

THAT SIN IS NOT A NEGATION, BUT A POSITION[1]

That this is the case is something that has been steadfastly defended by orthodox dogmatics and by orthodoxy in general, which have rejected as pantheistic every definition of sin that made it into something merely negative, into weakness, sensuality, finitude, ignorance, and the like. Orthodoxy has very correctly recognized that this is where the battle is to be joined, or, to recall our earlier remarks, that this is where the end of the thread has to be made fast, this is where to take a stand. Orthodoxy has correctly recognized that if sin is defined negatively, the whole of Christianity wavers. Orthodoxy therefore insists that there must be a revelation from God in order to teach the fallen human being what sin is, a communication which, quite consistently, must be believed, for it is a dogma. And it is self-evident that the paradox, the faith, the dogma—these three resolutions—form an alliance and a harmony that is the most certain support and bulwark against all pagan wisdom.

Thus with orthodoxy. Owing to a peculiar misunderstanding, a so-called speculative dogmatics[2] has indeed involved itself with philosophy in suspect fashion, thinking itself capable of *comprehending* that this

specification of sin is a position. But if that is true, then sin is a negation. The secret of all comprehending is that comprehending is itself higher than every position that it posits. The concept posits a position, but the fact that it is comprehended means precisely that it is negated. Although speculative dogmatics is itself to some extent aware of this, it knows of no other remedy than (and this is indeed quite unbecoming for a philosophical science) to put into the field a detachment of assurances at the point where the movement is being made. They utter assurances with ever greater solemnity, swearing oath upon oath and uttering imprecations to the effect that sin is a position, that to say that sin is merely a negation is pantheism and rationalism and God knows what else, but altogether something that speculative dogmatics renounces and abominates—and then they proceed to comprehend the fact that sin is a position. That is, that it is only a position to a certain degree, no more than that a person can in fact comprehend it. # **[210]#**

And this same duplicity on the part of speculation emerges at a different point, though touching upon the same issue. The category of sin, or the manner in which sin is defined, is of decisive importance for the category of repentance. Seeing as this business of the negation of the negation is indeed so speculative, then, inevitably, repentance must be the negation of the negation[3]—and thus sin of course becomes the negation. — Furthermore, it surely would be desirable if, for once, a sober-minded thinker would make clear the extent to which this purely logical matter—which calls to mind both logic's original relation to grammar (two negatives constitute an affirmative) and mathematics—the extent to which this logical matter has validity in the world of actuality, in the world of qualities; whether the dialectic of qualities is not something altogether different; whether "the transition"[4] does not play another role here. Sub specie æterni, æterno modo,[i] etc., there are no distances between one thing and another; therefore, everything *is*, and there is no transition whatsoever. In this abstract medium, to *posit* is *eo ipso* the same as to *annul*. But to regard the actual world in the same manner is indeed something close to madness. One can also say, entirely *in abstracto*, that the Perfectum[ii] follows the Imperfectum.[iii] But if a man were to conclude from this that in the actual world it followed of itself and followed immediately that a work he had not

completed (*imperfectum*) became complete, he would indeed be quite mad. But this is also how it is with the so-called position of sin when the medium in which it is posited[5] is pure thought: the medium is much too volatile for the matter of its being a position to be taken seriously.

However, all this sort of thing is of no concern to me here. I simply continue to stand firmly behind the Christian doctrine that sin is a position —though not as something that can be comprehended, but as a paradox that must be believed. In my view, this is the right way to approach this. If one can simply show that all the attempts at comprehending it are self-contradictory, the matter falls into its proper place, and it then becomes clear that the question of whether or not one will believe must be left to faith. — I can well comprehend (and this is by no means too divine to be comprehended) that a person who absolutely must comprehend, and who can approve only of what makes claims of comprehending, will find this very paltry. But if the whole of Christianity depends upon this point—that it shall be believed and not comprehended, that either it shall be believed or a person shall be offended by it—is it then so meritorious to want to comprehend? Is it meritorious, or is it not rather either shamelessness or thoughtlessness to want to comprehend **#[211]#** that which does not want to be comprehended? If a king gets the idea of wanting to be entirely incognito, to be treated in every way as an ordinary man, then—if most people think it is a greater distinction to pay royal homage to him—is that, then, the right thing to do? Or is it not in fact an assertion of oneself and of one's ideas against the king's will, of doing what one wants instead of deferring? Or, if the king did not want to be treated like that, I wonder whether it would please him if such a person became increasingly inventive in paying him homage as a subject, that is, in demonstrating increasing ingenuity in opposing the king's will? — So let others admire and praise the person who claims to be able to comprehend Christianity: I regard it as a straightforward ethical task—which perhaps requires not a little self-denial in such speculative times, when all "the others" are busy comprehending—to confess, indeed, that one neither can nor is obliged to comprehend it. This, however, is precisely what the times, what Christianity, needs: a little Socratic ignorance[6] with respect to Christianity—but note well, a little "Socratic" ignorance. Let us never forget (though how many are there,

indeed, who have ever really known it or thought it?)—let us never forget that Socrates' ignorance was a form of the fear and worship of God,[7] that his ignorance was a Greek version of the Jewish saying: "The fear of God is the beginning of wisdom."[i] Let us never forget that it was precisely out of reverence for the Deity that he was ignorant, that to the extent a pagan was capable of doing so, he stood guard as a judge, keeping watch on the boundary between God—and human beings, keeping a close watch in order that the deep gulf [i] of qualitative difference remain fortified between them, between God and human beings, so that God—and human beings might not, as it were, philosophice, poetice,[ii] etc., merge into one. Look, this was why Socrates was the one who knew nothing, this was why the Deity acknowledged him as wisest.[8] — But Christianity teaches that everything Christian exists only for faith; therefore it wants to be precisely a Socratic, god-fearing ignorance that, by means of ignorance, protects faith against speculation, keeping watch in order that the gulf of qualitative difference between God—and human beings might remain fortified as it is in the paradox and in faith, so that God and human beings do not, in a manner even more frightful than ever happened in paganism, *philosophice*, *poetice*, merge, as it were, into one—in the System.[9]

Here, the fact that sin is a position can be illuminated **#[212]#** only from one side. In the preceding part, the account of despair showed a continuing ascent. The expression of this ascent was both the intensification of the consciousness of the self and the ascent from passive suffering to conscious action. Both expressions in turn unite as an expression of the fact that despair does not come from without, but from within. And to the same degree it indeed also increasingly asserts itself positively, i.e., as a position. But according to the definition of sin that has been set forth here, the self, infinitely intensified by the conception of God, belongs to sin as, in turn, does the greatest possible consciousness of sin as an act. — This is an expression of the fact that sin is a position: the fact that it is *before God* is precisely what is positive about it.

Moreover, in a completely different sense, the qualification of sin as a position also has within itself the possibility of offense, the paradox. The paradox indeed follows as a consequence of the doctrine of the atonement. First, Christianity proceeds to establish sin so firmly as a position that the

human understanding can never comprehend it; and then, it is this same Christian doctrine which, in turn, takes it upon itself to remove this position in a manner that the human understanding can never comprehend it. Speculation, which talks itself out of the paradoxes, trims things back a bit at each of these two points, so things go a bit more easily: it makes sin out to be not at all so positive—and despite this, it cannot really get it into its head that the sin is to be entirely forgotten. But here once again, Christianity, the original inventor of the paradoxes, is as paradoxical as possible; it works counter to itself, as it were, when it establishes sin so firmly as a position that it then seems completely impossible to get rid of it again—and then it is precisely Christianity which, through the atonement, wants to abolish sin so completely that it is as though it were drowned in the sea.[i]

Appendix to A

But then, does not sin in a certain sense become a great rarity? (the moral)

In the First Part it was pointed out that the more intensive despair becomes, the more rarely it occurs in the world. But here sin is of course despair that has been qualitatively intensified once again, and mustn't it surely be **#[213]#** very rare? Strange difficulty! Christianity subjects everything to sin;[i] we have striven to present the Christian view as rigorously as possible—and now this curious result emerges, this curious result that sin is indeed not found at all in paganism, but only in Judaism and Christianity, and even there it is very rare.

But it is quite true that this is in fact how things are, though only in one sense. To sin is: "after having been enlightened by a revelation from God concerning what sin is, before God in despair not to will to be oneself, or in despair to will to be oneself," and it is indeed rarely the case that a person is so developed, is so transparent to himself, that this can apply to him. But what, then, follows from this? Indeed, this is certainly something worthy of careful scrutiny, for here there is a peculiar dialectical turn. For of course it does not follow, if a person is not in despair in the more intensive sense—from this, it of course does not follow that he is not in despair. On the

contrary; it has been shown precisely that most people—by far, by far most people—are in despair, but in despair to a lesser degree. Nor is it any way meritorious to be in despair to a higher degree. Aesthetically, it is an advantage, for aesthetics has an eye only for strength; but ethically, the more intense form of despair is further from salvation than the lesser form.

And this is also how it is with sin. Most people's lives, characterized from a neutral-dialectical point of view, are so far from the good (faith) that they are almost too spiritless to be called sin, indeed, almost too spiritless to be called despair.

To be a sinner in the strictest sense is certainly very far from being meritorious. But on the other hand, how in all the world can one find an essential consciousness of sin (and note, this is something Christianity indeed wants) in a life that is so sunken in triviality, in silly mimicking of "the others," that one almost cannot call it—that it is too spiritless to be called—sin, and is worthy only, as Scripture says, "of being spit out."[i]

But this is not the end of the matter, for then the dialectic of sin simply takes hold in a different fashion. How, indeed, does it come about that a person's life becomes so spiritless that it is as if Christianity simply cannot be brought to bear upon it, as when a jackscrew (and Christianity's capacity to lift upward is similar to that of a jackscrew) cannot be brought to bear # **[214]#** because there is no solid ground, but only marsh and bog? Is it something that happens to a person? No, it is the person's own fault. No one is born spiritless, and however many, in death, bring that with them as life's only outcome—it is not life's fault.

But it must be said as unreservedly as possible that this so-called Christendom—in which everyone by the millions is thus without further ado Christian, so that there are just as many, exactly as many, Christians as there are people—that this is not merely a poor edition of Christianity, full of typographical errors that distort the meaning, and with thoughtless omissions and additions, but that it is a misuse of it, that it has taken Christianity in vain. In a little country, scarcely three poets are born in each generation, but there are plenty of priests, many more than can find positions. With poets, people speak of their having a call; in the view of many people (and thus, of Christians), in order to become a priest it is sufficient to have passed the examination. And yet a true priest is even more

rare than a true poet—and yet the word “call” was originally used in connection with religious matters. But in Christendom people have still preserved the idea that being a poet amounts to something, and that there is something to the notion of its being a call. On the other hand, in the view of many people (and thus, of Christians), being a priest is bereft of every elevating notion, lacking the least bit of anything mysterious—in puris naturalibus[i] a way of making a living. A “call” is an official appointment; people speak of getting a call; but to have a call—yes, people speak of that as well, of someone having a call in his gift.[10]

Alas, and the fate of this word in Christendom is like an epigram on the whole of Christianity. The problem is not that Christianity is not spoken of (thus, neither is the problem that there are not enough priests), but that it is spoken of in such a way that, in the final analysis, the mass of people don’t attach any meaning to it (just as the mass of people think that being a priest is absolutely no different from the utterly everyday pursuits of being a merchant, an attorney, a bookbinder, a veterinarian, etc.), so that what is loftiest and holiest makes no impression whatever, but is spoken and is heard as something that nowadays, God knows why, has become customary usage like so much else. What wonder, then, that—instead of finding their own conduct indefensible—people find it necessary to defend Christianity. — **#[215]#**

After all, a priest surely ought to be a believer. And a believer! A believer, after all, is surely someone who is in love—indeed, the most in love of all who are in love, after all, is only as an adolescent compared with a believer. Now, think of a lover. Isn’t it true that day in and day out, as long as the day lasts, and the night as well, he would be capable of speaking of his beloved? But do you think it would occur to him, do you think it would be possible for him, don’t you think that it would be an abomination to him to advance three reasons in an attempt to prove that there was, after all, something to this business of being in love—more or less as when the priest proves, on the basis of three reasons, that it is beneficial to pray: then the market price of prayer has sunk so low that three reasons are needed in order to help it gain a bit of respect. Or as when the priest (and this is the same sort of thing, merely more ludicrous) proves, on the basis of three reasons, that prayer is a blessedness that surpasses all understanding.[i] Oh,

priceless anticlimax: that something that surpasses all understanding is proven by three—reasons, which, if they are good for anything at all, surely do not surpass all understanding, and, precisely to the contrary, must make it clear to the understanding that this blessedness does not in any way surpass all understanding, for "reasons" are of course situated well within the range of the understanding. No, for that which surpasses all understanding—and for the person who believes in it—three reasons mean no more than three flasks or three stags![11] And now, further, do you think that it would occur to a lover to plead in defense of his being in love, that is, that he would concede that for him it was not something absolute, categorically absolute, but that he thought of it in combination with the objections that could be advanced against it, and that his defense emerged from this; that is, do you think that he could or would concede that he was not in love, that he would bear witness against himself to the effect that he was not in love? And if someone were to suggest to the person in love that he speak like this, don't you think that he would regard him as mad? And if, in addition to being in love, he was also a bit of an observer, don't you think that he would become suspicious that the person who suggested this to him had never known what it is to be in love or that he wanted him to betray and deny his love—by defending it? — Isn't it, after all, obvious that it could never occur to someone who is genuinely in love to want to prove it on the basis of three reasons, or to defend it, for he is something that is more than all reasons and more than every defense: he is in love. And the person who does this—he **#[216]#** is not in love; he merely pretends that he is, and unfortunately—or fortunately—he is so senseless that he merely bears witness against himself, bears witness to the fact that he is not.

But this is precisely the way in which Christianity is spoken of—by believing priests: either they "defend" Christianity, or they transpose it into "reasons," to the extent that they do not also dabble in "comprehending" it speculatively. This is what is called preaching, and in Christendom it is even regarded as something great that there is preaching of this sort and that someone then listens to it. And it is precisely for this reason (this is the proof of it) that Christendom is so far from being what it says it is, that the lives of most people, understood in the Christian sense, are indeed too spiritless even to be called sin in the strictly Christian sense.

[i] Latin, “from the point of view of eternity,” “in the mode of eternity,” phrases used by Spinoza in his *Ethics* to indicate a non-time-bound view of reality.

[ii] Latin, “perfect tense,” describing something completed in the past.

[iii] Latin, “imperfect tense,” describing something uncompleted in the past.

[i] See Ps. 111:10.

[i] See Luke 16:19–31, esp. v. 26.

[ii] Latin, “philosophically, poetically.”

[i] See Mic. 7:19.

[i] See Gal. 3:22.

[i] See Rev. 3:15–16.

[i] Latin, “in its pure natural state,” i.e., “purely and simply.”

[i] See Phil. 4:7.

#[217]#

B

THE CONTINUATION OF SIN

Every state of sin is a new sin; or, as it might be more accurately expressed and will be expressed in what follows, the state of being in sin is the new sin, is the sin. This perhaps seems to the sinner to be an exaggeration; at most, he acknowledges every actual new sin[1] as a new sin. But eternity, which keeps his account, must enter the state of being in sin as a new sin. It has only two categories, and "Whatsoever is not of faith is sin."[i] Every unrepented sin is a new sin, and every moment it is unrepented it is a new sin. But how rare is the person who has continuity with respect to his consciousness of himself! Most often, people are only conscious of themselves momentarily, conscious in connection with major decisions, but the everyday ones receive no attention; people are spirit of a sort once a week for an hour's time—clearly, this is indeed a rather bestial way of being spirit. But eternity is the essential continuity, it demands this continuity of a person, or that he be conscious of himself as spirit and have faith. The sinner, on the other hand, is subjected to the power of sin in such a way that he has no notion of its character as a totality, of the fact that he has gone astray on the road to perdition.[i] He pays attention only to each individual new sin with which, as it were, he increases his momentum on the road to perdition, just as if he had not at the preceding moment been proceeding down that road with all the momentum of the previous sins. So natural has sin become to him, or has sin become his second nature, that he finds the everyday routine quite in order, and he himself stops only for a moment each time he gets, as it were, new impetus from a new sin. In his

perdition, he is **#[218]#** blind to the fact that, instead of having the essential continuity of eternity by being before God in faith, his life has the continuity of sin.

But, “the continuity of sin”: isn’t sin precisely non-continuity? Look, here it is again, the argument that sin is merely a negation to which one can never acquire legal title, just as one can never acquire legal title to stolen goods—a negation, an impotent attempt to constitute itself, but which, suffering all of the torments of impotence in its despairing defiance, is nonetheless incapable of doing so. Yes, viewed speculatively, that is how it is, but from a Christian point of view (this must be believed, for it is of course a paradox that no human being can comprehend) sin is a position which develops an increasingly positive[2] continuity out of itself.

And the law governing the growth of this continuity is also different from what applies to the growth of a debt or to a negation. For a debt does not grow because it has not been paid—it grows every time it is increased. But sin grows at every instant one does not come out of it. So far is it from being possible that the sinner is correct in regarding only each new sin as an increase in sin, that, from a Christian point of view, the state of being in sin is really greater sin, is the new sin. There is even a proverb that says it is human to sin, but to remain in sin is devilish;[3] but from a Christian point of view it is properly understood somewhat differently. Merely desultory observation—which looks only at the new sin and springs over the intervening space, the interval between the particular sins—is a manner of observation as superficial as if one were to assume that a railroad train moved only each time the locomotive puffed. No, that puffing, and the forward motion that follows it, is not really what one should look at, but rather at the steady momentum with which the locomotive moves and which gives rise to that puffing. And that is how it is with sin. In the deepest sense, the state of being in sin is the sin; the particular sins are not the continuation of sin but are the expression of the continuation of sin; with each particular new sin the momentum of sin merely becomes more noticeable to the senses.

The state of being in sin is a worse sin than the particular sins; it is the sin. And, thus understood, the state of being in sin is the continuation of sin, is new sin. Generally speaking, people understand it differently, they think

that it is as if the one sin gives birth to new sin. But it has a much deeper origin, namely that the state of being in sin is new **#[219]#** sin. There is psychological mastery in the lines Shakespeare assigns to Macbeth (act 3, scene 2): *"Sündentsprößne Werke erlangen nur durch Sünde Kraft und Stärke."*[i] That is, sin has an inner consistency, and in this consistency of evil within itself, it also has a certain power. But if one looks only at the particular sins, one never comes to see things in this way.

Most people surely live with altogether too little awareness of themselves to have a notion of what consistency is; that is, they do not exist qua spirit. Their lives consist either of a certain childlike, lovable naïveté, or of nonsense, or of some sort of taking action and some sort of something happening, of this and that; now they do something good, and then in turn do something wrong, and then they begin all over again; now they are in despair for an afternoon, perhaps for three weeks, but then they are fine and jolly fellows again, and then are again in despair for a day's time. They play along in life, so to speak, but they never experience focusing completely on one thing, they never arrive at the notion of being infinitely consistent with oneself. That is why they are concerned only with the particular, with particular good deeds, particular sins.

Every existence that is within the category of spirit, even if it is only on a person's own responsibility and at his own risk, has an essential consistency within itself and a consistency in something higher, at least in an idea. But such a person is in turn infinitely fearful of any inconsistency because he has an infinite notion of what the consequence could be, that he could be torn out of the totality in which he has his life. The least inconsistency is an enormous loss, for he of course loses consistency; at that very moment, the magic could perhaps be undone; the mysterious power that bound all the forces in harmony could be exhausted; the spring could lose its tension; the whole of it could perhaps become chaos in which the forces contend with one another, causing the self to suffer, but in which there is no agreement, none at all, with oneself, no momentum, no impetus. The enormous machinery which in its consistency had been so tractable in its iron strength, so flexible in all its power, is in disarray, and the more excellent, the more splendid the machinery, the worse is the confusion. — The believer, who as such reposes in and has his life in the consistency of

the good, has an infinite fear of even the least sin, for he has infinitely much to lose. Immediate people, childish or childlike people, have nothing total to lose, they continually lose and win only in the particular instance or in connection with the particular thing. **#[220]#**

But with respect to the consistency of sin, as with the person of faith, so also with his counterpart, the demonic person. As the drunkard continually maintains his intoxication, day after day, out of fear of the stagnation, the dullness, that would set in and the possible consequences if he were to become entirely sober for one day, so, too, with the demonic person. Indeed, as when a good person, if someone were to approach him, trying to tempt him, exhibiting sin in one or another seductive form, would plead with that person, "Do not tempt me"—so are there surely examples of exactly the same thing with a demonic person. Confronted by someone who is stronger in the good than he is, who wants to present him with the good in all its blessed loftiness, the demonic person can plead, he can plead with tears in his eyes, that the other not speak to him, that he not—as he puts it—weaken him. Precisely because the demonic person is consistent in himself and is in the consistency of evil—for precisely this reason he also has a totality to lose. One single instant outside his consistency, one single dietary indiscretion, a single glance to the side, seeing and understanding the whole or even a part of it in a different manner for one instant—and he will perhaps never be himself again, he says. This means that he has abandoned the good in despair, it cannot indeed help him anyway, but it could certainly disturb him, make it impossible for him ever again to attain the full momentum of consistency, weaken him. Only in the continuation of sin is he himself, only in that does he live, does he have the impression of himself. But what does this mean? It means that the state of being in sin is that which—deep down, where he has sunk—holds him together, strengthening him, in ungodly fashion, with its consistency; it is not the particular new sin which (indeed, how frightfully mad!) helps him—rather, the particular new sin is merely the expression for the state of being in sin, which properly is sin.

Thus, by "the continuation of sin," with which we will now concern ourselves, is meant not so much the particular new sins as the state of being in sin, which in turn becomes sin's intensification within itself, a remaining in the state of sin with a consciousness of being in that state; thus here, as

everywhere, the law of motion for this intensification is that it is inward, in more and more intensive consciousness.
#[221]#

A

The sin of despairing over one's sin

SIN IS DESPAIR; THE intensification is the new sin of despairing over one's sin. It is also easily seen that this is indeed a matter of intensification—it is not a new sin, as when someone who once stole one hundred rixdollars steals one thousand rixdollars the next time. No, here there is no talk of particular sins: the state of being in sin is the sin, and this is intensified in a new consciousness.

To despair over one's sin is the expression of the fact that the sin has become or wants to be consistent with itself. It does not want to have anything to do with the good, does not want to be so weak as to listen to other talk once in a while. No, it wants to listen only to itself, wants to have to do only with itself, shut itself up within itself; indeed, it wants to enclose itself within yet another enclosure and, in despair over sin, secure itself against every assault or pursuit by the good. It is itself conscious of having destroyed the bridge behind it and in that way having made itself inaccessible to the good, just as the good is inaccessible to it—thus, even if in a weak moment it might itself will the good, that would nonetheless be impossible. Sin is itself separation from the good, but despair over sin is a second separation. This of course compels the sin to summon up its most extreme demonic powers, endowing it with the ungodly toughness or obduracy that compels it consistently to regard everything that goes by the name of repentance, and everything that goes by the name of grace, not only as empty and meaningless, but as its enemy, as that from which, above all, one must protect oneself, exactly as the good protects itself from temptation. Understood thus, the line by Mephistopheles (in *Faust*)[4] correctly states the fact that nothing is more miserable than a devil who is in

despair, for by “despair” it is meant that a person is so weak as to be willing to listen to something about repentance and grace. In describing the intensification of the relation between sin and despair over sin, one could say that the former is the break with the good, and the latter is the break with repentance.

Despair over sin is an attempt to survive by sinking even deeper; as when a person who ascends in a balloon rises higher by casting off weights, the person in despair sinks by casting off, with ever-increasing determination, everything that is good (for the weight of the good is what lifts a person up). He is sinking: he himself believes that he is actually ascending—he does, after all, become **#[222]#** lighter. Sin itself is the struggle of despair, but then, when the powers have been exhausted, there must be a new intensification, a new demonic self-enclosure in oneself: this is despair over sin. This is an advance, an increase in the demonic—of course, a deeper immersion in sin. It is an attempt to impart firmness and importance to sin as a power, inasmuch as it is now eternally decided that a person will hear nothing about repentance and nothing of grace. Nonetheless, despair over sin is in fact conscious precisely of its own emptiness, of the fact that it has nothing to live on, not even its notion of its own self. Macbeth’s lines (act 2, scene 2) are psychologically masterly: *“von jetzt [after he has murdered the king—and now is despairing over his sin] giebt es nichts Ernstes mehr im Leben; Alles ist Tand, gestorben Ruhm und Gnade.”* [i] What is *masterly* is the double stroke in the final words (*Ruhm und Gnade* [cxxv]). Through sin, that is, through despair over sin, he has lost every relation to grace—and, in addition, to himself. His selfish self culminates in ambition. Now he has indeed become king, and yet when he despairs over his sin and of the reality of repentance, of grace, he has also lost himself—he cannot keep on, not even for himself, and he is equally far from being able to enjoy himself in his ambition as he is from being able to take hold of grace.

———————

In life (that is, to the extent that despair over sin occurs in life—but in any case, something occurs that people refer to as such), this despair over sin is

most often misunderstood, presumably because in the world people usually encounter only frivolity, thoughtlessness, and sheer twaddle, and therefore really become quite solemn and respectfully remove their hats at every expression of anything deeper. Either out of a muddled unclarity concerning itself and its significance, or with a dash of hypocrisy, or with assistance from the cunning and sophistry that accompany all despair, despair over sin is not disinclined to take on an appearance of being something good. Thus it is supposed to be an expression of someone with a deeper nature, who is therefore so profoundly affected by his sin. I will give an example: If there were someone who had abandoned himself to one or another sin, but then had for a long time **#[223]#** successfully resisted the temptation—if he has a relapse and succumbs to the temptation once again, the dejection that ensues is by no means always sorrow over sin. It can be something very different; for that matter, it could also be indignation directed at Governance, as if it were Governance that had let him succumb to the temptation, as if it ought not to have been so severe with him, inasmuch as he had in fact successfully resisted the temptation for such a long time. But in any case, it is absolutely womanish simply to accept this sorrow at face value, to fail to pay even the least attention to the duplicity that is present in all passionateness, which is in turn something ominous that can result in the passionate person subsequently realizing—sometimes almost to the point of madness—that he has said the opposite of what he intended to say. Such a person gives assurances—perhaps expressing himself more and more emphatically—of how he is tortured and tormented by this relapse, how it brings him to despair: “I will never forgive myself for it,” he says. And all this is supposed to be the expression of how much good dwells within him, of the depth of his character. This is deliberately misleading. In presenting this, I have taken pains to let the catchphrase “I will never forgive myself for it” slip in, an expression that is usually heard in just such circumstances. And on the basis of precisely this expression one can immediately orient oneself dialectically. He will never forgive himself for it—but now, if God were to forgive him for it, he could at least have the decency to forgive himself. No, his despair over sin—and most of all, of course, the more his despair rages in the expression of its passion, whereby he informs against himself (something that scarcely occurs to him) by saying that he “will never forgive himself” for having been capable of sinning like that (for this

way of speaking is just about the opposite of the contrite brokenheartedness that prays God for forgiveness)—his despair over sin is very far from being in the category of the good, it is a more intensive category of sin, the intensity of which is a further deepening in sin. The fact is that during the time that he was successful in resisting temptation, he became better in his own eyes than he actually was, he became proud of himself. It is in the interest of that pride that the past now be altogether left behind. But with the relapse, the past suddenly becomes entirely present once again. His pride cannot bear this reminder, and thus this profound distress, etc. But the direction of this distress is clearly away from God, a concealed self-love and pride, instead of beginning humbly by humbly thanking God for having indeed **#[224]#** helped him resist the temptation for such a long time, by confessing to God and himself that this was already much more than he had deserved, and then humbling himself under the recollection of how he has been.

Here, as everywhere, is what the old edifying writings[5] explain so profoundly, so instructively, grounded in so much experience. They teach that God sometimes lets the person of faith stumble and fall into one or another temptation—precisely in order to humble him and thereby fortify him further in the good; the contrast between the relapse and the perhaps significant progress toward the good is so humbling, the identity with himself so painful. The better a person is, the deeper, of course, is the pain from the particular sin, and the more dangerous it is if he does not execute the turn properly—the least bit of impatience is dangerous. In sorrow, he may perhaps sink into the darkest melancholia—and a fool of a pastoral counselor would perhaps come close to admiring the profundity of his soul and the power of the good within him—as if this were of the good. And his wife—yes, she feels profoundly humbled in comparison to such an earnest and holy man who is capable of sorrowing over sin like this. Perhaps his talk is in fact even more deceptive, perhaps he refrains from saying, “I can never forgive myself for it” (as if he had perhaps previously forgiven himself his sins, which is blasphemy)—no, he says that God can never forgive him for it. Alas, and this is only a mystification. His sorrow, his concern, his despair is selfish (just as is the anxiety about sin that sometimes almost causes a person to sin out of anxiety, because it is self-

love that wants to be proud of itself, wants to be without sin)—and what he least needs is consolation, which is also why the enormous mass of grounds for consolation prescribed by the pastoral counselors merely make the sickness worse.
#[225]#

B

*The sin of despairing of * the forgiveness of sins (offense)*

HERE, THE INTENSIFICATION OF the consciousness of the self is knowledge of Christ, a self directly before Christ. First (in the First Part) came ignorance of having an eternal self; then knowledge of having a self in which there is at any rate something eternal. Then (in the transition to the Second Part) it was shown that this difference is included under the self which has a human notion of itself, or which has the human being as its criterion. The opposite of this was a self directly before God, and this formed the basis for the definition of sin.

Now comes a self directly before Christ, a self which, however, in despair wills not to be itself or in despair wills to be itself. For despair of the forgiveness of sins must be assigned either to the one or to the other formula for despair, that of weakness or that of defiance: that of weakness, which, in offense, does not dare believe; or that of defiance, which, in offense, does not will to believe. Except that here (because of course this is not about simply being oneself, but about being oneself within the category of being a sinner—that is, being oneself in the category of one's imperfection), weakness and defiance are the reverse of what they are otherwise. Ordinarily, weakness is: in despair not to will to be oneself. Here, that is defiance; for here it is of course defiance not to will to be oneself—the person one is, a sinner—and for this reason to want to dispense with the forgiveness of sins. Ordinarily, defiance is: in despair, to

will to be oneself. Here this—in despair to will to be oneself, a sinner, for whom there is no forgiveness—is weakness.

A self directly before Christ is a self intensified by the enormous concession from God, intensified by the enormous emphasis that falls upon it because God, also for the sake of this self, permitted himself to be born, became a human being, suffered, and died. As was stated previously: the greater the conception of God, the more self—so here it is the case that: the greater the conception of Christ, the more self. A self is, qualitatively, that by which it is measured. That Christ is the standard of measure expresses God's open attestation **#[226]#** to the enormous reality a self has; for only in Christ is it true that God is the human being's goal and criterion, or criterion and goal.—But the more self, the more intensive is sin.

The intensification of sin can also be shown from another side.[i] Sin was despair; the intensification was despair over sin. But now, in the forgiveness of sins, God offers reconciliation. But the sinner despairs, and the despair takes on even deeper expression: it is now related, in a way, to God, and in fact it is precisely because it is still further away that it is more intensively immersed in sin. When the sinner despairs of the forgiveness of sins, it is almost as if he were at close quarters with God—it sounds like direct address: "No, there is no forgiveness of sins, it is an impossibility," and it looks like a fistfight. But in order to say that, and in order that it be heard, a person must in fact distance himself qualitatively further from God, and in order to fight cominus like that, he must be eminus:[i] that is how strangely acoustics and spatial relations are arranged in matters of spirit. A human being must be at the greatest possible remove from God in order that the "no," which in a way wants to defeat God, can be heard: the greatest possible impudence toward God is furthest away; in order to be impudent toward God one must go far away; if a person is closer to him, he cannot be impudent, and if a person is impudent, this means *eo ipso* that he is far away.[6] How powerless a human being is directly before God! If one is impudent toward a very prominent person, one may perhaps be punished by being cast far away from him, but in order to be impudent toward God, one must go far away from him.

In life, this sin (to despair of the forgiveness of sins) is most often viewed erroneously, especially since the time when the ethical was

abolished, so that a healthy ethical word is rarely or never heard. In the aesthetic-metaphysical realm, despairing of the forgiveness of sins is honored as a sign of a deep nature, more or less as though one were to regard a child's naughtiness as a sign of a deep nature. Altogether, it is unbelievable how much confusion has come into the religious sphere after the abolition of the "Thou shalt," which is the sole regulative principle in the human relation to God. This "Thou shalt" must be included in every specification of the religious sphere; in its place, people have, in fantasy, made use of the notion of God or of the conception of God as a component of **#[227]#** human self-importance, in order to boost people's self-importance directly before God. As in political life, when a person becomes important in his own eyes by belonging to the opposition (and in the final analysis, probably wishes that there be a government in order, after all, to have something to oppose), so, in final analysis, do people not want to abolish God—simply so that they can become even more self-important by being the opposition. And everything that in days gone by was regarded with horror as the expression of ungodly disobedience has now become brilliant, a sign of a deep nature. "Thou shalt *believe*," that was what was said in the old days, as bluntly and as soberly as possible—now it is brilliant and a sign of a deep nature to be unable to. "Thou shalt believe in the forgiveness of sins," it was said, and the only commentary on that text was: "Something unfortunate will happen to you if you cannot do it, for what one shall do, one can do"[7]—now it is brilliant and a sign of a deep nature to be unable to believe in it. A wonderful result Christendom has brought things to! If not a single word were heard about Christianity, people would not be so conceited—nor was paganism ever that conceited; but, aided by the fact that Christian concepts are, as it were, floating in the air in unchristian fashion, they are pressed into the service of the most intensified impudence (insofar as they are not misused in some other but equally impudent manner). Isn't it indeed epigrammatic that in the pagan world, swearing was not customary, while it is truly at home in Christendom; that in the pagan world, the name of God was usually mentioned with great solemnity and with a certain shudder and a fear of the mysterious, while in Christendom, the name of God is a word that comes up most often in everyday conversation and is absolutely the word that is least thought about

and is used most carelessly, because the poor, revealed God (who was so incautious and foolish as to become revealed instead of keeping himself hidden as persons of high rank otherwise do) is known by the entire populace and has become an altogether too familiar personage for whom people render the great service of once in a while going to church, for which they are in turn praised by the priest, who thanks them on God's behalf for the honor of their visit, awarding them the title of "pious," while at the same time directing a bit of sidelong criticism at those who never do God the honor of going to church.

The sin of despairing of the forgiveness of sins is *offense*. The Jews were completely right in being offended by Christ because he claimed to forgive sins.[i] Unless a person is a believer (and in that case one of course believes that Christ was God), it requires a peculiarly high degree of spiritlessness (that is, that which is usually found in Christendom) in order # **[228]#** not to be offended at a person's wanting to forgive sins. And next, it requires an equally peculiar spiritlessness in order not to be offended at the idea that sin can be forgiven. This is the most impossible of all things for the human understanding—though I do not praise being unable to believe it as a sign of genius, for it *shall* be believed.

In the pagan world, of course, this sin did not exist. If the pagan could have had the true conception of sin (he could not even have that, as he did not have the conception of God), he could not have come any further than to despair over his sin. Indeed, what is more (and this is the only concession that can be granted to human understanding and human thinking) is that we would have to praise the pagan who actually went so far as to despair, not over the world, nor over himself in the ordinary sense, but over his sin.* From the human standpoint, it requires both depth of thought and ethical categories to be capable of this. No human being as such can come any further than this, and it is quite seldom that anyone comes this far. But with Christianity, everything is changed,[i] for thou shalt believe in the forgiveness of sins.

And what is the situation of Christendom with respect to the forgiveness of sins? Indeed, Christendom's situation is really one of despair of the forgiveness of sins; however, Christendom's situation must be understood as being so far behind that it is not even clear that this is the case. People

have not even arrived at the consciousness of sin; the sins they know are only of the sort that paganism also knew, and they live happily and well in pagan **#[229]#** peace of mind. But by living in Christendom, people go further than they do in paganism, they go along imagining that this peace of mind is—indeed, in Christendom it cannot be otherwise—the consciousness of the forgiveness of sins, in which the priest fortifies the congregation.

The fundamental calamity of Christendom is really Christianity; that is, that by being preached over and over again, the doctrine of the God-Man (which within Christianity is of course safeguarded by the paradox and by the possibility of offense) has been taken in vain; that the qualitative difference between God and humanity has been pantheistically abolished, first in dignified, speculative fashion, then by the mob in the streets and alleys.[8] Never has any doctrine on earth ever really brought God and man so close to one another as has Christianity, nor could any: only God himself can do that—every human invention merely remains a dream, an uncertain imagining. But neither has any doctrine ever protected itself so carefully against the most terrible of all blasphemies: that after God has taken this step, then to take it in vain, as though everything—God and man—merge into one and the same thing. Never has any doctrine defended itself against this as has Christianity, which defends itself by means of offense. Woe to the lax orators, woe to the lax thinkers, and woe, woe to all the adherents who have learned from them and sung their praises!

If order is to be maintained in existence—and that is something God in fact wants, for he is not a God of confusion[cxxx] —then, first and foremost, care must be taken to ensure that every human being is an individual human being, becomes conscious of himself as being an individual human being. If human beings are permitted to join together into what Aristotle calls the animal category,[9] the crowd, then (instead of being less than nothing, less even than the lowliest individual human being) this abstraction is regarded as being something: then it does not take long before this abstraction becomes God.[10] And then, then *philosophice*, the doctrine of the God-Man turns out to be true. Then, just as people in various countries have learned that the crowd makes a powerful impression upon the king,[11] and that the newspapers make a powerful impression upon privy councilors, so, in the end, do people realize that the *summa summarum* of all human beings

makes a powerful impression upon God. This is then called the doctrine of the God-Man, or that God and human beings are idem per idem.[i] Of course, not a few of the philosophers who participated in spreading this doctrine of the superiority of the generation over the individual turn away in disgust[12] when their doctrine has sunk so low that the mob has become the God-Man. But these **#[230]#** philosophers forget that this is, after all, their doctrine, they overlook the fact that it was not more true when the refined people adopted it, when the elite among the refined, or a select circle of philosophers, was the incarnation.

In other words, the doctrine of the God-Man has made Christendom impudent. It almost seems as if God had been too weak. His situation resembles that of a good-natured fellow who makes too many concessions and is then rewarded with ingratitude. It was God who came up with the doctrine of the God-Man, and now Christendom has impudently turned it around and foisted kinship upon God, so that the concession God has made comes to mean more or less what it means nowadays when a king grants a freer constitution—and people of course know what it means: "He really had to."[13] It is as if God has become involved in an embarrassing situation; it is as if a shrewd fellow would be right if he were to say to God: "It's your own fault—why did you get so involved with human beings? It would indeed never have occurred to anyone, never arisen in anyone's heart,[i] that there should be a likeness between God and human beings. It was you yourself who had it proclaimed, and now you are reaping the fruits."

But Christianity has protected itself from the beginning. It begins with the doctrine of sin. The category of sin is the category of individuality. Sin does not admit of being thought speculatively at all. The individual human being, after all, lies beneath the concept; one cannot think an individual human being, but only the concept "human being." — That is why speculative philosophy immediately starts discussing the doctrine of the generation's *predominance* over the individual, for it is too much to expect that speculation should acknowledge the *impotence* of the concept in relation to actuality. — But as one cannot think an individual human being, neither can one think an individual sinner; one can think the sin (then it becomes a negation), but not an individual sinner. This, however, is precisely the reason that there can be no earnestness about sin, if sin is

merely to be thought. For what is earnest is precisely the fact that you and I are sinners; earnestness is not sin in general, but the emphasis of earnestness lies upon the sinner, who is the single individual. In its relation to "the individual human being," speculation, if it is consistent, must disdain what it is to be an individual human being or to be that which cannot be thought; if it wants to do something along these lines it must say to the individual: "Is this something on which to waste time? By all means, forget it—to be an individual human being is to be nothing. Think—then you are the whole of humanity, **#[231]#** *cogito ergo sum*." Perhaps, however, one can doubt the truth of that, and the individual human being and being the individual human being is the highest. Though let that be. But to be entirely consistent, speculation must also say: "To be an individual sinner is not to be anything, it lies beneath the concept—don't waste time on it, etc." And after that, what? Instead of being an individual sinner, is a person to think sin (just as one is called upon to think the concept "human being" instead of being an individual human being)? And after that, what? By thinking sin, does one perhaps then oneself become "sin"—*cogito ergo sum*? An excellent suggestion! However, a person does not after all have to fear becoming sin in this way—pure sin—for sin indeed does not admit of being thought. Speculation itself must, however, concede this, for sin is of course a falling away from the concept. But, to stop arguing e concessis,[i] the principal difficulty lies elsewhere. Speculation does not take into account the fact that matters relating to sin always involve the ethical, which always emphasizes the reverse of what is emphasized by speculation and takes precisely the opposite steps; for the ethical does not abstract from actuality, but immerses itself in actuality, essentially operating with the assistance of the category that is overlooked and despised by speculation: individuality. Sin is a specification of the single individual; it is frivolity and a new sin to act as if being an individual sinner were nothing—when one is oneself an individual sinner. Here Christianity strikes a blow, makes the sign of the cross when confronted with speculation; it is just as impossible for speculation to escape from this difficulty as for a sailing vessel to sail directly upwind. The earnestness of sin is its actuality in the single individual, whether it be you or I; in speculation, one must ignore the

single individual; therefore, speculative talk of sin can only be frivolous. The dialectic of sin is diametrically opposed to that of speculation.

This is where Christianity begins, with the doctrine of sin, and thus with the single individual.* For it is of course true that Christianity has taught # **[232]#** about the God-Man, about the likeness between God and the human being,[iii] but it is a great hater of flippant or cheeky impudence. With the assistance of the doctrine of sin and the individual sinner, God and Christ have, in a manner entirely different from that employed by any king, secured themselves once and for all against the nation, the people, and the crowd, the public, etc., etc., item[i] against every demand for a freer constitution.[14] For God, all those abstractions simply do not exist; for God in Christ, there live only individual human beings (sinners)—yet God can manage it all, and he can take care of the sparrows as well.[ii] God is, above all, a friend of order,[iii] and to that end he is himself present at every point; at every moment he is omnipresent (which is listed in the *Primer* [15] as one of the attributes of God and which people think about a little every now and then, but which they certainly do not try to think about at every moment). His concept is not like that of the human being, under which the individual lies as something that cannot be included in the concept: his concept embraces everything, and in another sense he has **#[233]#** no concept. God does not avail himself of an abbreviation, he comprehends (comprehendit[iv]) actuality itself, all the particulars: for him, the individual does not lie under the concept.

The doctrine of sin, that you and I are sinners, a doctrine that unconditionally splits up “the mass,” thus fortifies the qualitative difference between God and human beings more profoundly than ever before—again, this can be done only by God; sin is, of course, *before God* etc. In nothing is a human being so different from God as in the fact that he, and thus every human being, is a sinner, and is that “before God,” whereby the opposites are indeed juxtaposed in a double sense: they are held together (continentur[v]), they are not permitted to part from one another, but by being held together in this manner, they show their differences all the more powerfully, as when one speaks of holding two colors side by side, opposita juxta se posita magis illucescunt.[i] Sin is the only attribute of those that are otherwise predicated of a human being that cannot in any

way, neither via negationis[ii] nor via eminentiæ [iii] be said of God. To say of God that he is not a sinner (in the same sense that he is not finite—that is, by via negationis—that he is infinite) is blasphemy.

As a sinner, the human being is separated from God by the most yawning qualitative abyss. And of course, when he forgives sinners, God is in turn separated from the human being by the same yawning qualitative abyss.[iv] If, indeed, it were possible, by way of a sort of reverse accommodation, to transfer the divine attributes to a human being, there would be one respect in which it would be eternally impossible for a human being to resemble God: in forgiving sins.

Here, then, lies offense in its most concentrated form, which has been found necessary by the very doctrine that has taught the likeness between God and human beings.

But offense is the most decisive possible qualification of subjectivity, of the individual human being. Of course, thinking of offense without thinking of a person who is offended is not quite as impossible as it is to think of a flute playing when there is no flautist,[17] but indeed, even thought must surely admit that offense (even more than falling in love) is an unreal concept that becomes actual only when there is a person, an individual, who is offended.

Thus, offense is related to the single individual. And with this, begins Christianity, by making each human being into an individual, an individual **#[234]#** sinner; and now it brings together every possibility of offense that can be found in heaven and on earth (over which only God disposes): and this is Christianity. Then it says to each individual: “Thou shalt believe,” i.e., either you shall be offended, or you shall believe. And not one word more: there is nothing more to add. “Now I have spoken,” says God in heaven, “We will speak again in eternity. In the meantime, you can do what you will, but judgment approaches.”

A judgment! Yes, that is something we human beings have indeed learned, and indeed we learn from experience that when there is a mutiny aboard a ship or in an army, there are so many guilty people that the punishment must be waived; and when it is the public, the highly esteemed, cultivated public, or the people, then not only is there no crime, but, according to the newspapers—on which one can rely as one relies upon the

Gospel and revelation—it is God's will. Why is this so? It is because the concept "judgment" corresponds to the single individual. Judgment is not passed en masse. People can be put to death en masse, sprayed en masse, flattered en masse—in short, people can be treated like cattle in many ways, but people cannot be judged like cattle, for one does not pass judgment on cattle; no matter how many are judged, if the judging is to be earnest and truthful, judgment is passed on each individual.* Now, when so many are guilty, it is humanly impossible to deal with them; so people give up the entire matter, they realize that there cannot be any talk of judgment: there are too many to be judged, one cannot get hold of them or manage to get hold of them as individuals, so one must abandon *judging*.

And so, now, in our enlightened age, when people find all anthropomorphic and anthropopathic ways of thinking about God to be inappropriate, they nonetheless do not find it inappropriate to think of God in his capacity as a judge, as though he were comparable to an ordinary district judge or a judge advocate who cannot manage such a complicated case—so people conclude that this is exactly how things will be in eternity. Therefore, let us just stick together, making sure that the priests prattle in this manner. And should there be an individual who dared speak otherwise, an individual who was foolish enough to make his life troubled and to be responsible in fear and trembling, and who then also wants to plague # **[235]#** other people: then let us protect ourselves by regarding him as mad or, if necessary, by putting him to death. As long as many of us do it, no injustice is done. It is nonsense and antiquated to believe that the many can commit injustice; whatever is done by the many is God's will. In the past, and this is something we know from experience (and we are not inexperienced youths, we do not spout words frivolously,[i] we speak as men of experience), in the past, everyone—kings, emperors, and excellencies—have bowed before this wisdom. In the past, aided by this wisdom, all our livestock has been bred to produce improved strains, and so, by Gar, so must God, too, learn to bow. It's simply a matter of there being many of us, truly many, who stick together—if we do that, then we are protected against the judgment of eternity. — Yes, to be sure, they are protected—if it were only in eternity that they first become single individuals. But before God they were and are always single individuals; not even someone who is

seated in a cabinet of glass is as constrained as is every human being in his transparency before God. This is how things are with conscience. Assisted by conscience, matters are arranged such that each instance of guilt is accompanied immediately by a report, and the guilty person is himself the one who must write it. But it is written in invisible ink, and it becomes properly legible only when it is held up to the light in eternity when eternity audits consciences. Essentially, everyone arrives at eternity bringing with him and delivering the most exact accounting of every little instance when he did something wrong or failed to do what was right. Passing judgment in eternity is thus something a child could manage; there is really nothing for a third party to do; everything, down to the most insignificant word that was spoken, is accounted for. The guilty person on his journey to eternity is like the murderer who flees from the scene of the crime—and his crime—by making use of the speed of a railroad train. Alas, right under the coach in which he sat ran the electromagnetic telegraph cable that carried a description of him and the order that he be apprehended at the first station.[18] When he arrived at the station and stepped from the coach, he was arrested—he himself had, in a way, delivered his own arrest warrant.

Thus, despair of the forgiveness of sins is offense. And offense is the intensification of sin. This is something people do not usually think about at all; indeed, people hardly reckon offense as sin; people speak not of offense, but of sins, among which offense has no place. Even less do people regard offense as **#[236]#** the intensification of sin. This is because people do not, in Christian fashion, form the opposition between sin and faith, but between sin and virtue.

C

The sin of abandoning Christianity modo ponendo,[i] of declaring it to be untruth

THIS IS SIN AGAINST the Holy Spirit.[ii] Here the self is at the highest intensity of despair; not only does it cast away from itself the whole of Christianity,

but it makes it out to be a lie and untruth—what an enormously despairing notion of itself the self must have!

The intensification of sin becomes quite visible when it is viewed as a war between a human being and God in which the tactics are changed: the intensification consists of the ascent from defensive to offensive. Sin is despair; here one fights evasively. Then came despair over one's sin; here again, one fights evasively or fortified within one's withdrawn position, but always pedem referens.[iii] Now the tactics are changed; despite the fact that sin is increasingly absorbed in itself, and thus withdraws, in another sense it nonetheless comes closer, becomes more and more decidedly itself. Despair of the forgiveness of sins is a definite position in the face of God's offer of mercy; sin is not entirely in retreat, not merely defensive. But the sin of abandoning Christianity as untruth and a lie is offensive warfare. Everything that preceded this did, in a way, concede that the opponent is the stronger. But now sin is attacking.

Sin against the Holy Spirit is the positive form of being offended.[i]

Christianity's teaching is the doctrine of the God-Man, of the kinship between God and human beings, but, note well, in such a way that the possibility of offense is, if I dare put it this way, the guarantee whereby God protects himself, so that human beings cannot come too close to him. The possibility of offense is the dialectical element in everything Christian. If it is taken away, then Christianity is not merely paganism, but is something so fantasy laden that paganism must call it nonsense. To be as near to God as Christianity teaches a human being can come to him, and dare come to him, and must come to him in Christ, has never occurred to any human being. # **[237]#** Now, if this is to be understood straightforwardly, that is, precisely as it is, without the least reservation, altogether straightforwardly, in cheerful, open fashion: then—if paganism's poetry about the gods is called human madness—then Christianity is a mad god's invention; only a God who had lost his wits could come up with a doctrine such as this—that is how it must be judged by a human being who has kept his wits. If the human being were simply and straightforwardly to become his comrade, the incarnate God would become a parallel to Shakespeare's Prince Henry.[19]

God and human beings are two qualities between which there is an infinite qualitative difference. Humanly speaking, every doctrine that

ignores this difference is madness; divinely understood, it is blasphemy. In paganism, human beings made God a human being (the man-God); in Christianity, God makes himself a human being (the God-Man)—but in this, the infinite love of his merciful grace, he nonetheless makes one condition: he cannot do otherwise.[20] This is precisely Christ's sorrow: "he cannot do otherwise"; he can abase himself, assume the form of a servant,[i] suffer, die for human beings, invite all to come to him,[ii] sacrifice every day of his life and every hour of the day, and sacrifice his life—but he cannot take away the possibility of offense. Ah, singular work of love! Ah, unfathomable sorrow of love, that even God cannot—as, in another sense, he in fact does not will, cannot will—but even if he wanted to, he could not make it impossible that this work of love can become for a person precisely the opposite of what it is, that it can become the greatest misery! For the greatest possible human misery, greater even than sin, is to be offended in Christ and to remain in offense. And Christ cannot, "love" cannot, make this impossible. Look, this is why he says: "Blessed the person who is not offended in me."[iii] More than this he cannot do. Thus, with his love he can —this is possible—he can come to make a person more miserable than a person could ever have been otherwise. Ah, unfathomable contradiction in love! But nonetheless, out of love, he cannot find it in his heart to refrain from carrying out the work of love—alas, even though it then made a person more miserable than he would ever have been otherwise!

Let us speak of it in strictly human terms. Ah, how wretched the person who has never felt the urge of love to sacrifice everything for love and who thus was unable to do so! But then, if he discovered that precisely this, his # **[238]**# sacrifice out of love—that it was possible that this could become the greatest unhappiness for the other person, the beloved—what then? Then either the love within him would lose its resilience, and, from being a powerful, living force, collapse into a withdrawn pondering of wistful feelings, and he would abandon love, not daring to carry out that work of love, he himself sinking, not under the task, but under the weight of that possibility. For just as a weight becomes infinitely heavier when it is placed at the end of a rod and the person lifting it must hold the opposite end, so does every deed become infinitely heavier when it becomes dialectical, and heaviest when it becomes sympathetic-dialectical, so that what love

encourages one to do for the beloved, concern for the beloved seems, in turn, to counsel against. — Or love would conquer, and he would venture to do it out of love. Ah, but in love's joy (as love is always joyful, especially when it sacrifices everything) there was, however, a profound sorrow—for there was indeed that possibility! So, you see, he would therefore perform this, his work of love; not without tears, he would make the sacrifice (in which, for his part, he would exult); that somber possibility hovers over this —what shall I call it?—this historical painting of the inner life. And yet, if this had not hovered over it, his deed would not have been one of true love. — Oh, my friend, what have you indeed attempted in life! Exert your brain, tear aside every covering and lay bare the viscera of feeling in your breast, drop all the defenses that separate you from the person about whom you read, and then read Shakespeare—and you will shudder at the collisions. But Shakespeare himself seems to have shrunk back from the genuinely religious collisions. Perhaps, indeed, these can be expressed only in the language of the gods. And that is a language that no human being can speak, for as a Greek[21] has already put it so beautifully: "From men, man learns to speak, from the gods, to keep silent."

That there is an infinite qualitative difference between God and human beings constitutes the possibility of offense, which cannot be taken away. Out of love, God becomes a human being.[i] He says, "See, this is what it is to be a human being," but he adds, "Ah, take care, for I am also God—blessed the person who is not offended in me." As a human being, he assumes the form of a lowly servant, he expresses what it is to be a person of humble station, so that no one is to feel he is excluded or feel that it is human esteem or the respect of other people that bring a person closer to # **[239]#** God.[ii] No, he is a lowly human being. "Look here," he says, "and learn with certainty what it is to be a human being; ah, but take care, for I am also God—blessed the person who is not offended in me." Or the reverse: "The Father and I are one,[iii] yet I am this particular, lowly human being, poor, forsaken, delivered into the hands of human beings[iv] —blessed the person who is not offended in me. I, this lowly human being, am the one who makes the deaf hear, the blind see, the lame walk, who cleanses lepers, who causes the dead to arise—blessed the person who is not offended in me."[v]

Therefore, under responsibility to the highest authority, I dare to say that these words, “blessed the person who is not offended in me,” are a part of the proclamation about Christ, if not in the same manner as the words of institution of the Eucharist, then as the words “Let every man examine himself.”[vi] They[22] are Christ’s own words, and, especially in Christendom, they must again and again be enjoined upon people, repeated, spoken to each person individually. Wherever* these words remain unspoken, or wherever the presentation of Christianity is not permeated with this thought at every point, Christianity is blasphemy. For without a bodyguard and without servants who could prepare the way for him[ii] and make people aware of who it was who was coming, Christ walked here on earth in the form of a lowly servant. But the possibility of offense (ah, what a sorrow this was to him in his love!) defended and continues to defend him, fortifying a yawning gulf between him and the person who was closest to him and stood nearest him.

Indeed, the person who is not offended—he *worships* in faith. But to worship, which is the expression of faith, is to express that the infinite, yawning, qualitative **#[240]#** gulf [iii] between them is fortified. For in faith, the possibility of offense is again the dialectical element.*

But the type of offense treated here is *modo ponendo*; it says of Christianity that it is untruth and a lie, and thus in turn says the same of Christ.

To illuminate this type of offense, it will be best to go through the various forms of offense, which are primarily related to the paradox (Christ) and which thus recur in every specification of Christianity, because each such specification relates to Christ, has Christ in mente.[iv]

The lowest form of offense, that which, from a human point of view, is least culpable, is to allow the entire matter of Christ to remain undecided, to judge as follows: “I do not permit myself to judge in this matter; I do not believe, but I pass no judgement.” That this is a form of offense escapes most people. The fact is that people have entirely forgotten that Christian “*Thou shalt*.” This is why people do not see that to treat Christ as a matter of indifference like this constitutes offense. The fact that Christianity has been proclaimed to you means that you shall have an opinion concerning Christ: he is—or that fact that he exists and that he has existed—is decisive

for the whole of existence. If Christ is proclaimed to you, then it is offense to say: “I do not want to have an opinion concerning that.”

But this must be understood with a certain reservation in these times, when Christianity is preached in the mediocre fashion that now prevails. No doubt, there are **#[241]#** many thousands of people who have heard Christianity preached and have never heard anything about this “shall.” But if the person who has heard it says, “I do not want to have any opinion concerning that,” then he is offended. That is, he denies the divinity of Christ, denies that it has the right to require of a human being that he shall have an opinion. It does no good if such a person says, “I am indeed not saying anything concerning Christ, neither yes nor no,” for then one simply asks him, “Then, do you also have no opinion concerning whether or not you shall have an opinion concerning him?” If, to this, he answers, “Yes,” he has trapped himself, and if he answers, “No,” Christianity judges him anyway: he shall have an opinion concerning it, and thus, in turn, concerning Christ—that no human being may presume to let the life of Christ remain in abeyance as a curiosity. When God allows himself to be born and become a human being, it is not some idle caprice, something he does on a whim so that he might at least have something to do, perhaps to put an end to the boredom which, as someone has disrespectfully remarked, is supposedly connected with being God[23]—it is not in order to have an adventure. No, when God does this, then this fact constitutes the seriousness of existence. And this, in turn, is the seriousness in this seriousness: that each person *shall* have an opinion about it. When a king visits a provincial town, he regards it as an affront if, without sufficient excuse, a royal official fails to pay him his respects; but I wonder what he would think if someone were to ignore entirely the fact that the king was in the town, if someone were to pretend he was a private citizen, who thus “doesn’t care a whit about His Majesty and the Royal Law.”[24] And this is also the situation when God deigns to become a human being—that a human being (and what a royal official is to the king, a human being is to God) deigns to say: “Well, that is something about which I do not wish to have any opinion.” This is how a person speaks in dignified fashion about what he is actually ignoring: thus, in dignified fashion, a person is ignoring God.

The next form of offense is the negative, but passive, suffering, form. It does not in fact feel that it can ignore Christ; it is not capable of setting the matter of Christ aside and in other respects lead a busy life. But neither can it believe; so it continues to stare at one and the same point: at the paradox. To this extent, however, it does in fact honor Christianity: it expresses that this question, "What do you think of Christ?"[i] is actually what is most decisive. Someone who has been offended in this way goes on living as a shadow; his life is consumed because in his innermost self, he is constantly **#[242]#** preoccupied with this decision. And in this way he expresses (as the suffering of unhappy love does in relation to love) the reality that Christianity possesses.

The final form of offense is the form with which we here concern ourselves, the positive form. It declares Christianity to be untruth, a lie; it denies Christ (that he has existed and that he is the one he said he was) either in the manner of Docetism[25] or rationalism;[26] so that either Christ does not become a particular human being, but is only apparently such, or he becomes merely a particular human being—thus either, in the manner of Docetism, he becomes poetry, mythology, which make no claim to be actuality, or in the manner of rationalism, he becomes an actuality that makes no claim to be divinity. In this denial of Christ as the paradox there is, of course, also a denial of the whole of Christianity: sin, the forgiveness of sins. etc.

This form of offense is sin against the Holy Spirit. As the Jews said of Christ, that he cast out devils with the help of the devil,[i] so does this form of offense make Christ into an invention of the devil.

This offense is the highest intensification of sin, which people most often overlook because they fail to form, in Christian fashion, the opposition sin/faith.

On the other hand, that opposition has been put forward throughout the whole of the present work, which, right at the beginning—in the First Part, A, A[ii]—set forth the formula for the state in which there is no despair at all: in relating to itself, and in willing to be itself, the self is grounded transparently in the power that established it. As has often been pointed out, this formula is, in turn, the definition of faith.

* Note the difference between despairing *over* one's sin and despairing *of* the forgiveness of sins.
* Note that here despair over sin is thought of dialectically, oriented toward faith. Even though the present work concerns itself only with despair as sickness, it must never be forgotten that there is this dialectical aspect—it is indeed inherent in the fact that despair is really the first element in faith. On the other hand, if the direction is away from faith, away from the relationship to God, then despair over sin is the new sin. In the life of the spirit, everything is dialectical. Thus, as an annulled possibility, offense is an element in faith; but offense in the direction away from faith is sin. One can fault a person for not even being capable of being offended by Christianity. In speaking like this, one of course speaks of being offended as of something good. And on the other hand, it must of course be said that it is a sin to be offended.
* The doctrine of the human race's sin has often been misused because attention has not been paid to the fact that sin, however common it is to all, does not bring human beings together in a shared concept, into a society or a company ("any more than the mass of dead out in the cemetery form any sort of society"[16]), but separates human beings into individuals and holds each individual fast as a sinner—a separation which in another sense is in harmony with and, teleologically, tends toward the perfection of existence. People have not taken note of this and thus have thought that the fallen race has, once and for all, been made good again by Christ. And in so doing people have in turn saddled God with an abstraction that wants, as an abstraction, to be in closer kinship with him. But this is a pretense that merely makes people brazen. When, indeed, "the single individual" is to feel himself in kinship with God (and this is what Christianity teaches[i]), then he also receives, in fear and trembling,[ii] the entire weight of it; he must—were it not already an ancient discovery—discover the possibility of offense. But if the individual is to come to this glory by means of an abstraction, then the entire affair becomes too easy and is essentially taken in vain. Then the single individual does not receive the enormous pressure of God, which, in humiliating, presses down just as far as it lifts up; by participating in that abstraction, the single individual imagines he has everything as a matter of course. Being a human being is not like being an animal, where the specimen is always less than the species. The human being stands apart from other animal species not merely owing to the advantages that are usually mentioned, but qualitatively, by the fact that the individual, the single individual, is more than the species. And this specification is in turn dialectical, which means that the single individual is a sinner, but also in turn that it is perfection to be the single individual.
* And this is now the case almost everywhere in Christendom, which, as it seems, *either* entirely ignores the fact that Christ himself is the one who so repeatedly, so urgently, warned against offense at the end of his life, including even his faithful disciples,[i] who had followed him from the beginning and had forsaken everything for his sake—*or*, even if tacitly, regards it as a sort of overwrought anxiety on the part of Christ, inasmuch as the experience of thousands upon thousands of people makes it clear that one can have faith in Christ without taking the least notice of the possibility of offense. But I daresay this is an error and that this shall surely be made manifest when the possibility of offense comes to judge Christendom.
* Look, this is why God is "the Judge," because for him there is no mass, but only single individuals.
* Here is a little task for observers. If one assumes that all the many priests, here and abroad, who deliver and write sermons are believing Christians, how can it be explained that one never hears or reads the prayer which is especially appropriate for our times: "God in heaven, I thank you for not having required of a person that he shall comprehend Christianity, for if that were required, I would be the most miserable of all.[i] The more I seek to comprehend it, the more incomprehensible it appears to me, the more I simply discover the possibility of offense. Therefore, I thank you, that you only require faith, and I pray that you will continue to let it increase within me."[ii] This prayer would

be entirely proper with respect to its orthodoxy and, assuming that it was truly present in the person who prays, it would in addition be properly ironic with respect to the whole of speculative philosophy. But I wonder whether faith is to be found on earth![iii]

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[i] See Matt. 26:31.
[i] See 1 Cor. 15:19.
[ii] See Luke 17:5.
[iii] See Luke 18:1–8.
[i] See, e.g., Gen. 1:26 and Acts 17:29.
[ii] See Phil. 2:12; see also Eph. 6:5 and 1 Cor. 2:3.

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[i] See Rom. 14:23.
[i] See Matt. 7:13.
[i] German, “Works sprung from sin only gain power and strength through sin.” Kierkegaard did not read English, and he often read Shakespeare in Schlegel and Tieck’s translation, which in this case fits his argument somewhat better than Shakespeare’s English (act 3, scene 2): “Things bad begun make strong themselves by ill.”
[i] German, “from now on, there is no longer anything serious in life; everything is trivial, fortune and grace are dead.” Kierkegaard did not read English, and he often read Shakespeare in Schlegel and Tieck’s German translation, which here closely follows Shakespeare’s original English text (in act 2, scene 3), which reads: “from this instant, there’s nothing serious in mortality: all is but toys: renown and grace is dead.”
[i] German, “renown and grace.”
[i] Variant: “another side” appears in draft material in Kierkegaard’s hand; the first printing has “a side.”
[i] Latin, Roman military terms for “hand to hand” and “at a distance.”
[i] See Matt. 9:1–8 and Mark 2:7.
[i] Allusion to 2 Cor. 5:17.
[i] See 1 Cor. 14:33.
[i] Latin, “the same.”
[i] See 1 Cor. 2:9.
[i] Latin, properly “*ex concessis*”: “to argue from what has been conceded.”
[iii] See Gen. 1:26.
[i] Latin, “as well as,” “furthermore.”
[ii] See Matt. 10:29.
[iii] Allusion to 1 Cor. 14:33.
[iv] Latin, “comprehends,” “includes.”
[v] Latin, “are held together.”
[i] Latin, “opposites become more visible when they are juxtaposed.”

[ii] Latin, “the way of negation”; in Scholasticism, an argument that sought to come to knowledge of God’s attributes by denying and removing everything imperfect from God.
[iii] Latin, “the way of excellence”; a Scholastic argument that sought to come to knowledge of God by attributing to God, in their perfect, most sublime form, all the attributes of his creatures.
[iv] See Luke 16:26.
[i] Possibly an allusion to Luke 24:11.
[i] Latin, “in the manner that affirms or posits,” i.e., positively.
[ii] See Matt. 12:31–32, Mark 3:28–29, and Luke 12:10.
[iii] Latin, “pulling the foot back,” i.e., retreating.
[i] See Matt. 12:31–32.
[i] See Phil. 2:7.
[ii] See Matt. 11:28.
[iii] See Matt. 11:6.
[i] See John 3:16.
[ii] See, e.g., Acts 10:34.
[iii] See John 10:30.
[iv] See Mark 14:41.
[v] See Matt. 11:5–6.
[vi] See 1 Cor. 11:27–29.
[ii] See Mark 1:2–3.
[iii] See Luke 16:26.
[iv] Latin, “in mind.”
[i] See Matt. 22:42.
[i] See Matt. 9:34, Matt. 12:22–30, and Mark 3:22.
[ii] See p. 39 in the present text.

NOTES

Translator's Introduction

1. The Danish term Kierkegaard uses is *Spidsborger*, which is allied to the German *Spiessbürger*, and originally meant a free citizen (Danish, *Borger*) who, even though not so wealthy as to own a horse and join the cavalry, was nonetheless wealthy enough to be permitted to be a part of the militia for the defense of the city, and as such to be permitted to carry a spear (Danish, *Spyd*). Thus a *Spidsborger* was a respectable, spear-carrying member of the middle class, and by the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the word had come to be a term of contempt, equivalent to the English "bourgeois philistine." The term *Spidsborger* or "bourgeois philistine" thus associates a certain self-satisfaction and smugness with a particular social class.

Foreword

1. The reference to "world history" is directed at the philosophy of G. W. F. Hegel (1770–1831), whose philosophical system included an attempt to understand the development of world history.
2. See, e.g., Rom. 6:2 and Col. 2:20. See also 1 Pet. 2:24. Mysticism and pietism accentuated this notion, making a person's daily life one of dying away from sin and the pleasures of the world in self-denial and in complete separation from everything temporal, finite, and worldly. Thus the emphasis changed from a person's having died away from sin through Christ to an insistence that a person must also die away from sin through faith.

A. That Despair Is the Sickness unto Death

1. Here and elsewhere in *The Sickness unto Death*, Kierkegaard's term, which is translated as "established," is *sat* (past participle of Danish *sætte*, to posit or propose, equivalent to the Latin *ponere*, which in the everyday sense means to place or put, and in philosophical use means to posit or propose). This will subsequently become important in the present work, where it is argued that the highest form of "offense" is the "positing"—i.e., advancing the "position"—that Christianity is untrue.
2. Kierkegaard here refers to Cicero, *De natura deorum* [On the Nature of the Gods], bk. 2, chap. 56, §140, trans. H. Rackham, Loeb Classical Library (London: Heinemann, 1933), pp. 257, 259.
3. In the version of the Old Testament that was authorized in Kierkegaard's day, Gen. 2:16–17 reads as follows (in English translation): "God, the LORD, commanded the man, saying: You may eat freely of all the trees in the garden, but of the tree of knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for on the day you eat of it, you shall die the death."

4. Cited from the poem “En aandelig Sang, hvori indføres Forsonerens Jesu Christi kierlige Advarsel til dem, som fristes af de onde og ulyksalige Tanker at ville forkorte deres eget Liv” [A Spiritual Song That Includes the Redeemer Jesus Christ’s Loving Admonition to Those Who are Tempted by Evil and Unhappy Thoughts of Wanting to Shorten Their Own Lives] by the Danish poet and dramatist Johannes Ewald (1743–1781). Kierkegaard cites this line in an 1843 journal entry: see entry JJ:59 in *KJN* 2:147.
5. Kierkegaard’s Danish term for gangrene is *den kolde Brand* (literally, the cold fire).
6. This motto, which refers to Julius Caesar (c. 100–44 BC), was chosen by the Italian politician and military leader Cesare Borgia (1475/1476–1507).
7. Kierkegaard’s reference is to the “A” on p. 19 preceding the subhead that begins “Despair is a sickness in the spirit, in the self.”
8. See Plato, *Republic*, 608d–611a, in *Plato: The Collected Dialogues*, pp. 833–36.

C. The Forms of This Sickness (Despair)

1. See *Pap.* VIII^2 B: 171, 17: “Thus the art of properly writing dramatic lines, lines that resound, in full-throated fashion and with all the intensity of the imagination, from a single passion, and yet in which there is a resonance of the opposite passion: no poet, save the only one—Shakespeare—has been capable of exercising this art.”
2. Refers to the German philosopher Johann Gottlieb Fichte (1762–1814), who stated that “the productive power of imagination” is the source of our notion of the world beyond our consciousness (“the not-I”) and the origin of the basic categories of understanding that support consciousness.
3. A reference to so-called Russian horn music, popular in the mid-eighteenth century, in which the orchestra consisted of a large group of musicians who could blow on one or two hunting horns, each of which could produce only a single note.
4. During the period 1813–1875, the Danish monetary system was based on the rixdollar, which was divided into marks and shillings, with six marks to the rixdollar and sixteen shillings to the mark. In 1840, a pound of rye bread, the staple of the day, cost two to four shillings.
5. Here, the phrase Kierkegaard uses, “to make a pact with the world” (Danish, *forskrive sig Verden*) alludes to the phrase “to make a pact with the devil” (Danish, *forskrive sig til Fanden*); see *Pap.* VIII^2 B: 150, 7.
6. I.e., inherent in the dialectical fact that the self is a synthesis. See the parallel language in the opening line of the First Part, C, A., a, β (see p. 43): “That this is the case, as was shown under α, is inherent the dialectical fact that the self is a synthesis, and thus either element is its opposite.”
7. See G. W. F. Hegel, *The Science of Logic*, trans. George di Giovanni (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 486. See also G. W. F. Hegel, *Hegel’s Science of Logic*. trans. A. V. Miller (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1969), p. 551.
8. Hoffmann’s drops, named for the German chemist and physician Friedrich Hoffmann (1660–1742), were a chemical mixture believed in Kierkegaard’s day to be an antidote to fainting, dizziness, etc.
9. An allusion to the story of the Greek king Midas, related by Ovid in bk. xi of his *Metamorphoses*; see Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, trans. Frank Justus Miller, 2 vols., Loeb Classical Library (London: William Heinemann, 1916), vol. 2, pp. 126–31.
10. In Kierkegaard’s day, the word for nitrogen was *Kvælstof*, literally, “that which suffocates.”

11. See Plato, *Cratylus*, 428d: “Excellent Cratylus, I have long been wondering at my own wisdom. I cannot trust myself. And I think that I ought to stop and ask myself, What am I saying? For there is nothing worse than self-deception—when the deceiver is always at home and always with you—it is quite terrible,” in *Plato: The Collected Dialogues*, p. 462.
12. The Danish term Kierkegaard uses here translates literally as “the first floor,” because in standard European (including British) usage the ground floor, which is often a small business or a shop, is not enumerated in counting the floors of a building. This “first floor” generally had higher ceilings and was appointed better than the rest of the dwelling; thus Kierkegaard subsequently refers to it as the *belle-étage*, using the common danicized French term for the best floor in the house.
13. I.e., the philosophical system of the German idealist philosopher G. W. F. Hegel.
14. See Søren Kierkegaard, *Begrebet Angest*, chap. III, §1, in *SKS* 4:396–99; *The Concept of Anxiety*, trans. Reidar Thomte with Albert B. Anderson, vol. 8 in *Kierkegaard’s Writings* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1980), pp. 93–96; *The Concept of Anxiety*, trans. Alastair Hannay (New York: W. W. Norton, 2014), pp. 114–17. The section is entitled “The Anxiety of Spiritlessness.”
15. See Jakob and Wilhelm Grimm, *Irische Elfenmärchen* [Irish Folktales of Elves] (Leipzig, 1826), p. lxxxiii.
16. Stock phrase from a Latin saying from the Middle Ages (“*Virtutes paganorum splendida vitia*”: “The virtues of the pagans are splendid vices”), which is frequently—though incorrectly—attributed to the Roman Catholic bishop and teacher Augustine (354–430).
17. Suicide was praised by the Greek Stoics, e.g., Zeno of Citium (335–263 BC), and their successors during the Roman Empire, e.g., Seneca the Younger (c. 4 BC–AD 65), Epictetus (c. AD 50–135), and Marcus Aurelius (AD 121–180).
18. See Kierkegaard, *Begrebet Angest*, chap. III, §1, in *SKS*, 4:398: “In spiritlessness there is no anxiety—it is too happy and satisfied and spiritless for that. But this is a very lamentable reason, and in this paganism differs from spiritlessness, in that the former is oriented in the direction *toward* spirit, the latter in the direction *away* from spirit.” See also *The Concept of Anxiety*, trans. Thomte with Anderson, p. 95; *The Concept of Anxiety*, trans. Hannay, p. 116.
19. In an 1835 journal entry, Kierkegaard writes: “Just as a child takes time to learn to distinguish itself from objects and for quite a while so little distinguishes itself from its surroundings that, keeping the stress on the passive side, it says things like ‘*me* hit the horse,’ this same phenomenon repeats itself in a higher spiritual sphere.” Entry AA:12 in *KJN* 1:19.
20. The house where Kierkegaard was born and in which he lived until 1837 was situated in the middle of Copenhagen and was immediately adjacent to Copenhagen’s city hall and courthouse; in 1844 Kierkegaard moved back into that house and lived there until April 27, 1848, while he was working on *The Sickness unto Death.*
21. Under the law governing the State Church at the time, funeral sermons were optional. It was permissible for a priest to accept payment of ten rixdollars for giving such sermons, though the priest was forbidden to prescribe any specific fee.
22. The Danish verb for “making things whole” is *hele*, and the Danish word for “recipient . . . of stolen goods” is *Hæler*.
23. Here Kierkegaard makes an untranslatable wordplay. In Danish, the preposition in “to despair *over* something” is the same as in English, namely *over*. The Danish preposition meaning “of” in “to despair *of* something” is *om*, while the Danish word for “conversion” is *Omvendelse* (literally, “a turning around”), and Kierkegaard italicizes the first two letters of the word (*Om*) in order to emphasize the connection between “to despair *of*” (Danish, “at fortvivle *om*”) and “*con*version” (“*Om*vendelse”).

24. An allusion to name of a popular Copenhagen club, Det Bestandige Borgerlige Selskab (the Perpetual Bourgeois Club), founded in 1798. The club held balls and dinners, and members could play billiards and other games: the club's founding charter states that its primary purpose was "shared enjoyment and good association with one another."
25. A Danish commission for prison reform was established in 1840, and in 1846 it decided to adopt some features of the "Pennsylvania system" that promoted solitary confinement, which supposedly had the benefits of compelling prisoners to reflect on their condition and thus become more receptive to religion.
26. See Shakespeare, *Richard III*, act 4, scene 4, where, in order to drown out his mother's accusations, Richard III shouts: "A flourish, trumpets! strike alarum, drums! Let not the heavens hear these tell-tale women rail on the Lord's anointed: Strike, I say!"
27. I.e., in the heading of the immediately preceding section, α, "In despair not to will to be oneself, weakness's despair."
28. "Reversal" is a frequently occurring expression in Hegelian dialectical philosophy, referring to the point at which the concept, owing to the dialectical nature of reason, "reverses" into its opposite, so that the truth emerges in a higher identity that preserves both the (apparent) difference and the identity.
29. Prometheus was a mythical Greek hero whom Zeus chained to a rock because he had stolen fire from the gods and given it to humans.
30. In Danish, "*en*closure" is "*Inde*lukke," and "*ex*clusively" is "*ude*lukkende"; *inde* and *ude* are opposites, meaning "in" and "out," respectively, and Kierkegaard italicizes the prefixes to emphasize the parallel and the contrast.

A. Despair Is Sin

1. Inexpensive popular lithographs and copper prints, often with crude lines and exaggerated coloring.

Chapter One. The Gradations in Consciousness of the Self (The Qualification: Before God)

1. The Danish word translated here as "standard of measure" and translated below as "criterion" is *Maalestok*, literally meaning "measuring stick."
2. The Danish word here translated as "goal" is *Maal*, which, in addition to meaning "goal," can mean "measure"; Kierkegaard thus plays on the parallel terms *Maalestok* (see preceding note) and *Maal*.
3. See Paper 401:2 from 1848 in *KJN* 11, pt. 2, p. 182, where Kierkegaard summarizes a lecture by the Danish New Testament theologian H. N. Clausen, whose lectures on dogmatics he had attended in 1833–1834. Kierkegaard's source could also be Karl Hase, *Hutterus redivivus oder Dogmatik der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche* [Hutterus Redivivus, or a Dogmatics for the Evangelical Lutheran Church], 4th ed. (Leipzig, 1839 [1828]), pp. 193–95 and 208–11. Hase's work is a standard reference text to which Kierkegaard frequently refers in his notebooks and journals. Hase explains that it was the view of "the old Church dogmaticians [that] all sins are sins against God," while "in modern morality, sin is commonly defined as 'a self-determination of the will, in defiance of the ethical law.' " By "modern morality," Hase presumably means Kantian morality.

4. See Hase, *Hutterus redivivus*, pp. 216–17, where an account is given of "the old Church dogmaticians' account of 'sins of commission,' " in which the first group of sins, concerning the object of the sin, is divided into "sins against God," "sins against one's neighbor," and "sins against oneself."
5. I.e., following the doctrine promulgated by the fifth-century British monk Pelagius, who, in opposition to Augustine's notion of original (or "inherited") sin, taught that human beings could of their own free will live sin-free lives.
6. Stock phrase that renders a Latin saying from the Middle Ages ("*Virtutes paganorum splendida vitia*": "The virtues of the pagans are splendid vices"), which is frequently—though incorrectly—attributed to the Roman Catholic bishop and teacher Augustine (354–430).
7. An idiomatic designation of human beings as mortals, which occurs six times in the New Testament. See, e.g., Matt. 16:17, 1 Cor. 15:50, Gal. 1:16, and Eph. 6:12.
8. Speculative, i.e., Hegelian, philosophy, in which opposites are "suspended" or "annulled" by reason's "comprehending" them.
9. Kierkegaard frequently denigrated Copenhagen (Danish, Kjøbenhavn) as being a mere "market town" (Danish, *Kjøbstad*), which was the legal designation of much smaller provincial towns that possessed a royal charter permitting them to serve as the market town for the surrounding area. In 1845, Copenhagen had a population of c. 127,000.
10. A reference to the "golden mean"; see Aristotle, *Nichomachean Ethics*, bk. 2, chap. 6, 1108c–1109c; see *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, ed. Jonathan Barnes, 2 vols. (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1984), vol. 2, pp. 1750–52; see also Horace, *Odes and Epodes*, ed. and trans. Niall Rudd, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2004), bk. 2, no. 10, v. 5.

Chapter Two. The Socratic Definition of Sin

1. See, e.g., Plato, *Protagoras*, 357e, in *Plato: The Collected Dialogues*, p. 348.
2. In Kierkegaard's day, "going further" and "going beyond" were expressions used by Danish Hegelians, at first with reference to going beyond Descartes, and later with reference to going beyond other philosophers, including Hegel himself. Thus, Kierkegaard is here making satirical reference to his contemporary Danish Hegelians, such as Johan Ludvig Heiberg (1791–1860) and Hans Lassen Martensen (1808–1884), who wanted to go further than Hegel.
3. On Socratic ignorance, see, e.g., Plato, *Apology*, 21a–d, in *Plato: The Collected Dialogues*, pp. 7–8.
4. See, e.g., bk. 3, §56 in Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of the Eminent Philosophers*, trans. R. D. Hicks, 2 vols., Loeb Classical Library (London: William Heinemann, 1925), vol. 1, pp. 326–27.
5. The Danish term Kierkegaard uses is *Arvesynd* (a cognate of the German *Erbsünde*), literally meaning "inherited sin" (or "hereditary sin"). The present translation uses "inherited sin" in place of the usual English term, "original sin," as this better conveys Kierkegaard's meaning.
6. See n. 53, *supra*.
7. In the philosophy of Immanuel Kant (1724–1804), a "categorical imperative" describes a command or an obligation that is valid under all circumstances.
8. An allusion to Socrates' notion of midwifery: see Plato, *Theatetus*, 150b–151c, in *Plato: The Collected Dialogues*, pp. 855–56.
9. I.e., Socrates.
10. An Adrienne was a woman's gown, inappropriately worn by a foolish man in the Norwegian-Danish playwright Ludvig Holberg's comedy *Den politiske kandestøber* [The Political Tinker]. It

may also be an allusion to the gowns worn by the clergy.

11. This sentence begins in the third person—"when one sees a person"—and continues in the first person—"when I then see that same person," which makes it seem likely that this is a reference to Bishop Jacob Peter Mynster (1775–1854), primate of the State Church (which, as discussed in the Translator's Introduction, was renamed the Danish People's Church after the adoption of the June Constitution of 1849).
12. An allusion to the revolutionary wave that began in France in February 1848 and subsequently reached much of Europe, including Denmark.
13. Here Kierkegaard is referring to "Chladni figures," the symmetrical patterns produced in dry sand sprinkled on a plate of glass or metal when the plate's rim is stroked by a violin bow or otherwise caused to vibrate. The phenomenon was discovered in 1787 by the German physicist E. F. F. Chladni (1756–1827) and was the subject of a celebrated scientific paper published in 1807 by the Danish physicist H. C. Ørsted (1777–1851).
14. See n. 57, *supra*.
15. Reversal is a frequently occurring expression in Hegelian dialectical philosophy, referring to the point at which the concept, owing to the dialectical nature of reason, "reverses" into its opposite, so that the truth emerges in a higher identity that preserves both the (apparent) difference and the identity.
16. See n. 13, p. 176.
17. In the Hegelian System, everything is ordered in accordance with the so-called speculative method, which presents the development of concepts in various areas of knowledge. According to speculative logic, the dialectic reflects the contradiction or imperfection in a concept, which forces it into its opposite (its "negation") and then further to "suspend" or "annul" the contradiction in a higher unity in which the contradiction is "reconciled."
18. I.e., philosophy from Descartes through Hegel.
19. Here Kierkegaard makes an untranslatable play on words, drawing a contrast between "standing still" (Danish, *Stilstand*) and "state of affairs" (Danish, *Tilstand*).
20. See, e.g., Plato, *Apology*, 21d, in *Plato: The Collected Dialogues*, pp. 7–8. Diogenes Laertius recounts the following anecdote about Socrates (bk. 2, §22): "They relate that Euripides gave him the treatise of Heraclitus and asked his opinion upon it, and that his reply was, 'The part I understand is excellent, and so too is, I dare say, the part I do not understand; but it needs a Delian diver to get to the bottom of it,' " Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of the Eminent Philosophers*, trans. R. D. Hicks (London: William Heinemann, 1925), 1:153. In the epigraph to *The Concept of Anxiety*, Kierkegaard cites J. G. Hamann's treatment of the above passage: " 'For Socrates was great because of the fact . . . that he distinguished between what he understood and what he did not understand' " (*SKS* 4:310; also see the translations in *The Concept of Anxiety*, trans. Reidar Thomte with Albert B. Anderson, vol. 8 in *Kierkegaard's Writings* [Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1980], p. 3; *The Concept of Anxiety*, trans. Alastair Hannay [New York: W. W. Norton, 2014], p. 3).
21. See n. 53, *supra*.
22. See, e.g., the Augsburg Confession, the principal Lutheran confessional text, article II, "Concerning Original Sin": "Furthermore, it is taught among us that since the fall of Adam, all human beings who are born in the natural way are conceived and born in sin. This means that from birth they are full of evil lust and inclination and cannot by nature possess true fear of God and true faith in God. Moreover, this same innate disease and original sin is truly sin and condemns to God's eternal wrath all who are not in turn born anew through baptism and the Holy Spirit," *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, ed. Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Weigert (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), pp. 36 and 38. The original

German text uses the word *Erbsünde* (hereditary or inherited sin) for the term here translated as "original sin."

Chapter Three. That Sin Is Not a Negation, but a Position

1. Kierkegaard here uses "position" in the technical philosophical sense, as something "posited," i.e., asserted or affirmed as a given that is not further reducible.
2. By "speculative dogmatics," Kierkegaard is referring to the "speculative theology" that evolved under the influence of F. W. J. Schelling (1775–1854) and, especially, Hegel, in the early decades of the nineteenth century. More specifically, Kierkegaard is referring to the work of the German Right Hegelian theologian Phillip Marheineke (1780–1846) and, more locally, to the Danish theologian Hans Lassen Martensen; see Marheinecke's *Die Grundlehren der christlichen Dogmatik als Wissenschaft* [The Fundamental Principles of Christian Dogmatics as a Science] (Berlin, 1827), and Martensen's *Grundrids til Moralphilosophiens System* [Outlines of the System of Moral Philosophy] (Copenhagen, 1841) and *Den christelige Dogmatik* [Christian Dogmatics] (Copenhagen, 1849). When Kierkegaard was a young university student, he employed Martensen as a tutor, and he subsequently attended Martensen's lectures.
3. In Hegelian terms, the "negation of the negation" is the third stage in the triadic development of the concept. As Johan Ludvig Heiberg expresses it in §15 of his "Det logiske System" [The Logical System], which appears in J. L. Heiberg, ed., *Perseus: Journal for den speculative Idee* [Perseus: Journal for the Speculative Ideal], 2 vols. (Copenhagen, 1837–1838), vol. 2, pp. 30–31: "the first element designates that which is in repose; the second element [designates] the negative or dialectical, and the third [designates] the negation of the negation. i.e., the mediated positive or the speculative, which has its negation in itself; or, the first designates infinity as immediate; the second, finitude; and the third reproduces the infinitude, but in a more concrete determination, by having included the finitude or negations of the second element. Overall, the third element is the unity of the first two; the entire development is a cycle in which the third element coincides with the first, but after having gained a greater significance."
4. See n. 15, p. 181.
5. Kierkegaard's term, which is here translated as "is posited," is *poneres* (present progressive tense of Danish *ponere*, to posit or propose, taken from the Latin *ponere*, which in the everyday sense means to place or put, and in philosophical use means to posit or propose).
6. On Socratic ignorance, see, e.g., Plato, *Apology*, 21a–d, in *Plato: The Collected Dialogues*, pp. 7–8.
7. See Plato, *Apology*, 28e–29a in *Plato: The Collected Dialogues*, p. 15.
8. See Plato, *Apology*, 21a–d in *Plato: The Collected Dialogues*, pp. 7–8.
9. See n. 24, p. 171.
10. In Kierkegaard's day, an appointment as priest in a parish of the established Church was technically in the gift of the monarch, who typically made appointments with the concurrence of the minister for church and educational affairs and the bishop of Zealand, in this case Bishop Jacob Peter Mynster.
11. In Kierkegaard's day, Three Flasks and Three Stags were the names of two pubs in or near Copenhagen.

B. The Continuation of Sin

1. The term Kierkegaard uses here, *aktuel ny Synd*, corresponds to theological concept “sin of commission.”
2. Here, “positive” is to be understood in the previously mentioned philosophical sense of “posited” or “affirmed.”
3. This is from an old saying included as no. 9920 in E. Mau, *Dansk Ordsprogs-Skat* [Treasury of Danish Proverbs], 2 vols. (Copenhagen, 1879), vol. 2, p. 392; in its full form, the saying reads: “It is human to sin, to remain in sin is devilish, but to arise from sin is Christian.”
4. Goethe’s *Faust*; see pt. I, sc. 14.
5. E.g., works by authors such as Johannes Tauler (c. 1300–1361), Thomas à Kempis (c. 1380–1471), and Johann Arndt (1555–1621).
6. Here, and in what follows, Kierkegaard makes use of an untranslatable wordplay. In Danish, the words here translated as “impudent” and “impudence” are *nærgaaende* (adjective) and *Nærgaaenhed* (noun), both of which mean, literally, “going (too) near” someone, i.e., disrespecting a person.
7. A central principle in Kant’s ethics is that what one can *shall* do, one *can* do.
8. The reference to the “dignified, speculative” abolition of the difference between God and humanity is to Hegelian philosophy, especially the Right Hegelians, including such Danish thinkers as Johan Ludvig Heiberg and Hans Lassen Martensen, while the reference to “the mob” could be to such Left Hegelians as Ludwig Feuerbach (1804–1872) and his influential work, *The Essence of Christianity* (1841), as well as to the popular political uprisings of 1848.
9. See Aristotle, *Nichomachean Ethics*, bk. 1, chap. 5 and *Politics*, 3, 1, in *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, ed. Jonathan Barnes, 2 vols. (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1984), vol. 2, pp. 1731–32 and 2023–24.
10. Probably a reference to *The Life of Jesus* (1835–1836) by David Friedrich Strauss (1808–1874).
11. A reference to the political upheavals in various European countries, including Denmark in particular, in 1848.
12. A reference to Danish Hegelian and Hegel-inspired philosophers and theologians, such as Johan Ludvig Heiberg and Hans Lassen Martensen, who were appalled by the political upheavals of 1848.
13. This is what happened in Denmark on March 21, 1848, when a crowd marched on the royal palace and the king immediately acceded, replacing absolutism with a constitutional monarchy. A new constitution, guaranteeing a broadly representative government, was ratified on June 4, 1849.
14. See n. 98, *supra*.
15. The reference is to N. E. Balle and C. B. Bastholm, *Lærebog i den Evangelisk-christelige Religion indrettet til Brug i de danske Skoler* [A Primer for the Evangelical Christian Religion, Prepared for Use in Danish Schools], (Copenhagen, 1791); see p. 4.
16. Kierkegaard is citing from his own work, *Opbyggelige Taler i forskjellig Aand* (1847); see *SKS* 8:247 and *Kierkegaard’s Writings*, 26 vols., ed. Howard V. Hoong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1978–2000), vol. 15, *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits* (1993), p. 150.
17. A reference to Plato’s *Apology*, 27b, in *Plato: The Collected Dialogues*, p. 13.
18. Although the first railroad in Denmark opened in 1847, the telegraph, which elsewhere had been in general use from 1846, came to Denmark only in 1855.
19. The companionable and informal young crown prince Hal (Prince Henry, subsequently King Henry V) appears in Shakespeare’s *Henry IV, Part One* and *Henry IV, Part Two*.
20. Presumably an allusion to Luther’s reply at the Diet of Worms in 1521, when he was asked to state clearly whether he would recant his teachings, which had been condemned by the Church: “Here I stand; I can do no other. God help me! Amen!”

21. A reference to *Moralia*, a collection of essays by the Greek philosopher and biographer Plutarch (AD 46–after 119). See *Moralia*, 506a: “No spoken word, it is true, has ever done such service as have in many instances words unspoken; for it is possible at some later time to tell what you have kept silent—but never to keep silent what once has been spoken—that has been spilled, and has made its way abroad”: *Moralia*, vol. 6, trans. W. C. Helmbold, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, Mass.: William Heinemann, 1962), p. 417.
22. I.e., “Blessed the person who is not offended in me,” Matt. 11:6.
23. A reference to a poem no. 66, “Heimkehr” [Homecoming] in the collection *Buch der Lieder* [Songbook] by the German poet Heinrich Heine (1797–1856). The poem begins: “I dreamed I am the dear God, sitting in heaven on high, and angels sat around me, praising my poetry. And I ate cakes and sweets worth many guilders, and I drank with cardinals, and had no guilt. But I was greatly plagued with boredom, I wished I were on earth, and were I not the dear God, I could become the Devil.”
24. The Royal Law (Danish, Kongeloven), promulgated 1665, established absolute monarchy in Denmark; most of the Royal Law was abolished by the constitution of June 5, 1849.
25. Originally, Docetism was the Gnostic idea that Christ did not have an actual human body, but only the apparition of a body; here, perhaps, an allusion to David Friedrich Strauss and Ludwig Feuerbach.
26. Rationalist theology, which was popular in the eighteenth century, required that all religious assertions be grounded in reason.

ALSO TRANSLATED BY BRUCE H. KIRMMSE FOR LIVERIGHT

Fear and Trembling

This translation is based on Søren Kierkegaard's pseudonymous work *Sygdommen til Døden*, text established by Finn Gredal Jensen, Kim Ravn, and Steen Tullberg, and published by the Søren Kierkegaard Research Centre in *Søren Kierkegaards Skrifter*, vol. 11 (Copenhagen: G.E.C. Gad's Publishers, 2006), pp. 113–242. Some of the explanatory notes are adapted from those by Tonny Aagaard Olesen and published by the Søren Kierkegaard Research Centre in *Søren Kierkegaards Skrifter*, vol. K11 (Copenhagen: G.E.C. Gad's Publishers, 2006), pp. 179–250. © University of Copenhagen, 2013.

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Production manager: Anna Oler

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data is available

ISBN 978-1-324-09124-0

ISBN 978-1-324-09125-7 (ebk.)

Liveright Publishing Corporation, 500 Fifth Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10110
www.wwnorton.com

W. W. Norton & Company Ltd., 15 Carlisle Street, London W1D 3BS